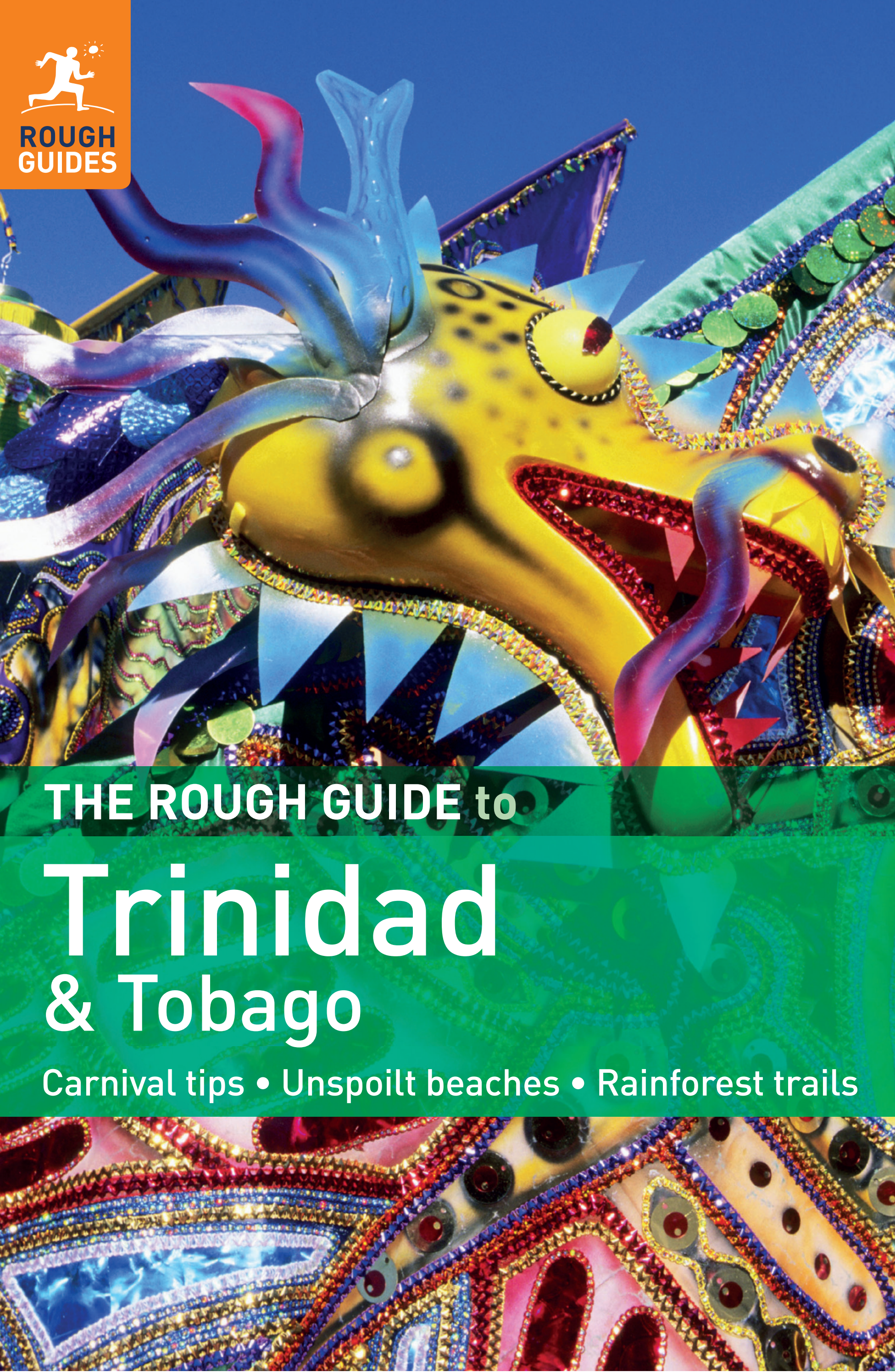
ROUGH GUIDES



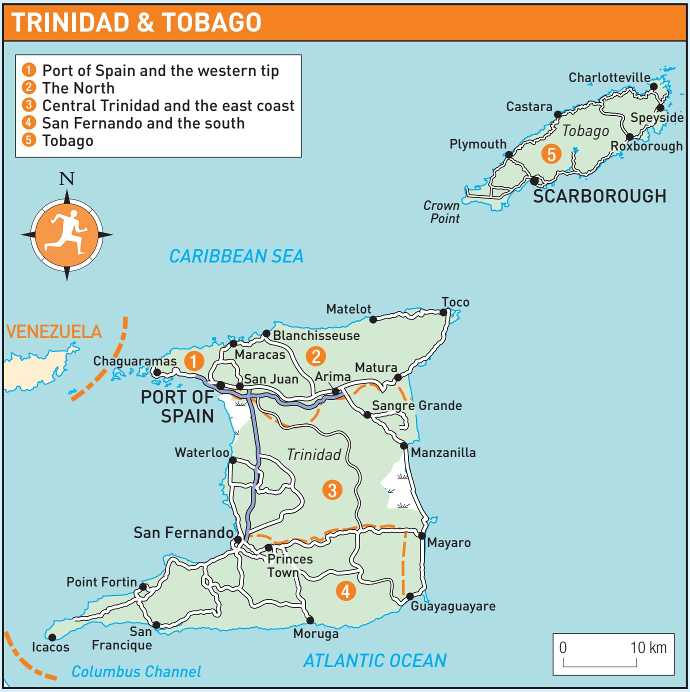
THE ROUGH GUIDE to

Trinidad & Tobago

Carnival tips • Unspoilt beaches • Rainforest trails

VISIT…

LANZAROTE
Caliente.com


TRINIDAD & TOBAGO
① Port of Spain and the western tip
② The North
③ Central Trinidad and the east coast
④ San Fernando and the south
⑤ Tobago
N
CARIBBEAN SEA
Charlotteville
Castara
Speyside
Tobago
Plymouth
Roxborough
Crown Point
SCARBOROUGH
VENEZUELA
Matelot
Toco
Blanchisseuse
Maracas
Chaguaramas
San Juan
Arima
Matura
PORT OF SPAIN
Sangre Grande
Waterloo
Trinidad
Manzanilla
San Fernando
Mayaro
Princes Town
Point Fortin
Guayaguayare
San Francique
Moruga
Icacos
Columbus Channel
ATLANTIC OCEAN
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10 km

About this book

Rough Guides are designed to be good to read and easy to use. The book is divided into the following sections, and you should be able to find whatever you need in one of them.

The introductory **colour section** is designed to give you a feel for Trinidad & Tobago, suggesting when to go and what not to miss, and includes a full list of **contents**. Then comes **basics**, for pre-departure information and other practicalities.

The **guide** chapters cover Trinidad & Tobago's regions in depth, each starting with a highlights panel, introduction and a map to help you plan your route.

Contexts fills you in on history, Carnival, music, wildlife and books, while individual **colour sections** introduce the great outdoors and festivals. **Language** gives you an extensive glossary and enough Trini expressions to get by.

The book concludes with all the **small print**, including details of how to send in updates and corrections, and a comprehensive **index**.

This fifth edition published November 2010.

The publishers and authors have done their best to ensure the accuracy and currency of all the information in *The Rough Guide to Trinidad & Tobago*, however, they can accept no responsibility for any loss, injury, or inconvenience sustained by any traveller as a result of information or advice contained in the guide.

The **Rough Guide** to

Trinidad & Tobago

written and researched by

Polly Thomas, Robert Coates & Dominique De-Light

www.roughguides.com

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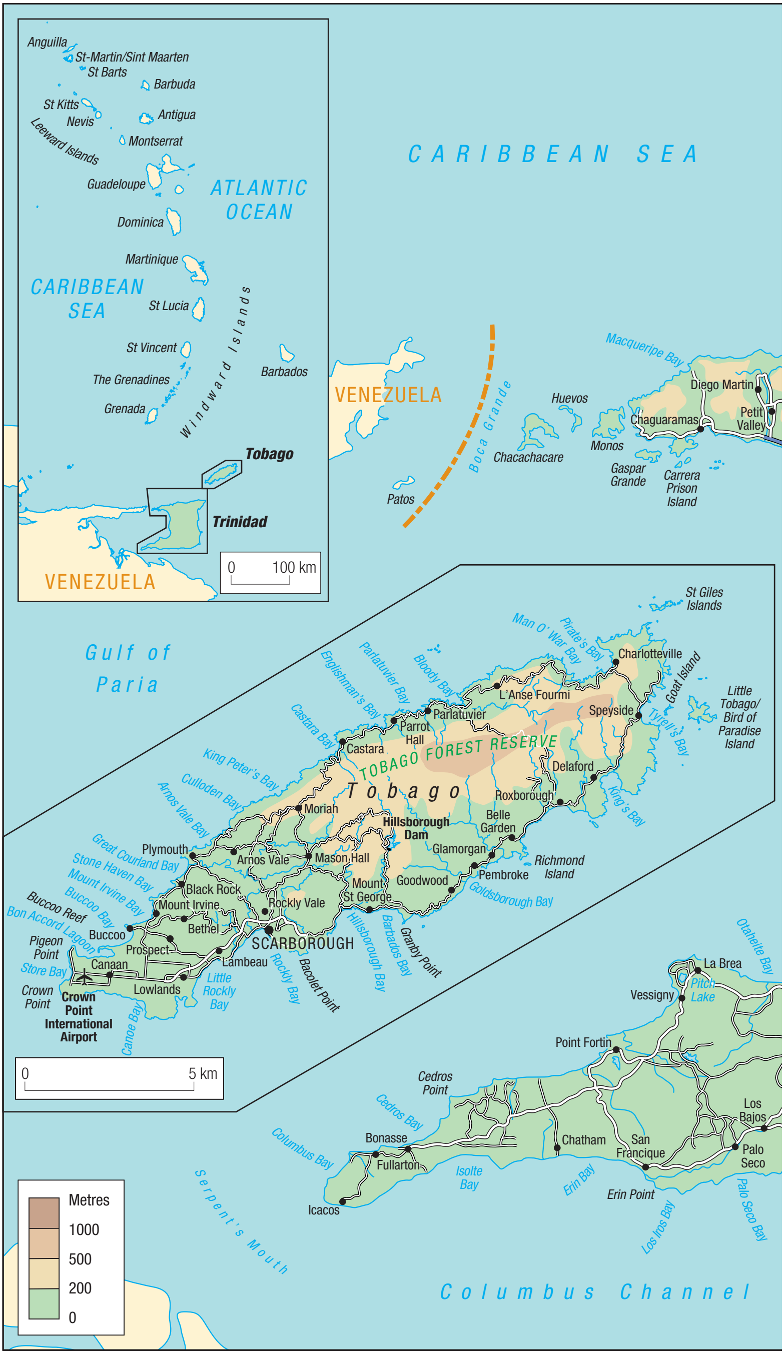
◀◀ Bikini mas, Trinidad Carnival ◀ Blanchisseuse, Trinidad


Anguilla
St-Martin/Sint Maarten
St Barts
Barbuda
St Kitts
Nevis
Antigua
Leeward Islands
Montserrat
Guadeloupe
ATLANTIC OCEAN
Dominica
Martinique
CARIBBEAN SEA
St Lucia
Windward Islands
St Vincent
Barbados
The Grenadines
Grenada
Tobago
Trinidad
VENEZUELA
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CARIBBEAN SEA
VENEZUELA
Boca Grande
Huevos
Chacachacare
Monos
Macqueripe Bay
Diego Martin
Chaguaramas
Petit Valley
Gaspar Grande
Carrera Prison Island
Patos
Gulf of Paria
St Giles Islands
Man O' War Bay
Pirate's Bay
Charlotteville
Goat Island
Little Tobago/ Bird of Paradise Island
Tyrell's Bay
Speyside
L'Anse Fourmi
Bloody Bay
Parlatuvier Bay
Englishman's Bay
Parlatuvier
Parrot Hall
Castara Bay
Castara
TOBAGO FOREST RESERVE
Delaford
King's Bay
Tobago
Roxborough
King Peter's Bay
Culloden Bay
Arnos Vale Bay
Moriah
Hillsborough Dam
Belle Garden
Glamorgan
Richmond Island
Plymouth
Great Courland Bay
Arnos Vale
Mason Hall
Pembroke
Stone Haven Bay
Mount Irvine Bay
Black Rock
Mount St George
Goodwood
Goldsborough Bay
Buccoo Bay
Mount Irvine
Rockly Vale
Buccoo Reef
Bon Accord Lagoon
Bethel
Buccoo
SCARBOROUGH
Pigeon Point
Prospect
Hillsborough Bay
Barbados Bay
Granby Point
Store Bay
Canaan
Lambeau
Rockly Bay
Bacolet Point
Little Rockly Bay
Crown Point
Lowlands
Crown Point International Airport
Canoe Bay
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Otaheite Bay
La Brea
Pitch Lake
Vessigny
Point Fortin
Cedros Point
Cedros Bay
Los Bajos
Columbus Bay
Bonasse
Chatham
San Francique
Palo Seco
Fullarton
Isolte Bay
Erin Bay
Erin Point
Icacos
Serpent's Mouth
Los Iros Bay
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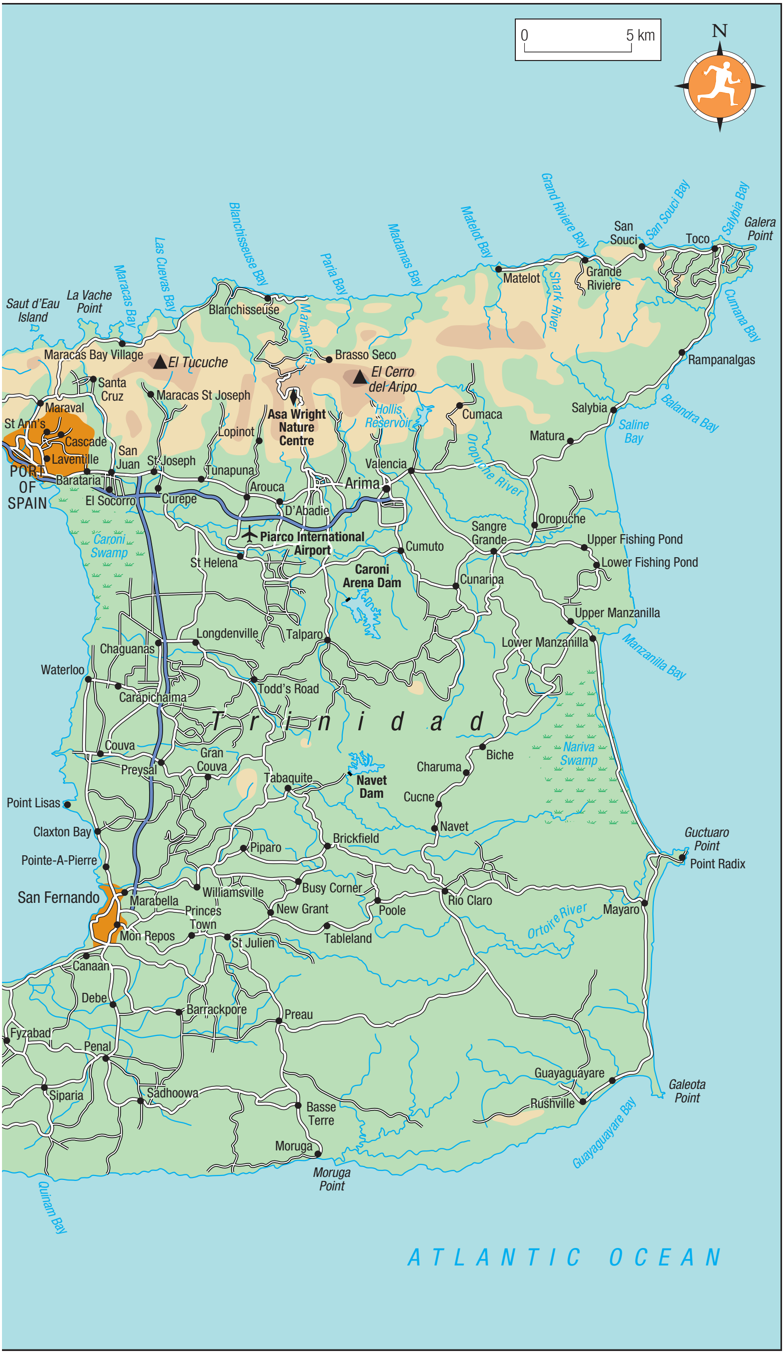

0 5 km
N
Grand Riviere Bay
San Souci Bay
Salybia Bay
Galera Point
San Souci
Toco
Matelot Bay
Madamas Bay
Paria Bay
Blanchisseuse Bay
Las Cuevas Bay
Maracas Bay
La Vache Point
Saut d'Eau Island
Matelot
Grande Riviere
Shark River
Cumana Bay
Blanchisseuse
Marianne R.
Maracas Bay Village
El Tucuche
Brasso Seco
El Cerro del Aripo
Rampanalgas
Santa Cruz
Maracas St Joseph
Maraval
St Ann's
Cascade
Laventille
PORT OF SPAIN
Asa Wright Nature Centre
Hollis Reservoir
Cumaca
Salybia
Balandra Bay
Saline Bay
Lopinot
Matura
San Juan
St Joseph
Tunapuna
Valencia
Oropuche River
Barataria
El Socorro
Curepe
Arouca
Arima
D'Abadie
Oropuche
Sangre Grande
Caroni Swamp
Piarco International Airport
Cumuto
Upper Fishing Pond
Lower Fishing Pond
St Helena
Caroni Arena Dam
Cunaripa
Upper Manzanilla
Longdenville
Talparo
Lower Manzanilla
Manzanilla Bay
Chaguanas
Waterloo
Todd's Road
Carapichaima
Trinidad
Couva
Gran Couva
Biche
Nariva Swamp
Preysal
Charuma
Tabaquite
Navet Dam
Cucne
Point Lisas
Navet
Claxton Bay
Brickfield
Guctuaro Point
Point Radix
Pointe-A-Pierre
Piparo
Williamsville
Busy Corner
San Fernando
Marabella
Rio Claro
Princes Town
New Grant
Poole
Mayaro
Ortoire River
Mon Repos
St Julien
Tableland
Canaan
Debe
Barrackpore
Preau
Fyzabad
Penal
Guayaguayare
Galeota Point
Siparia
Sadhoowa
Rushville
Basse Terre
Guayaguayare Bay
Moruga
Moruga Point
Quinam Bay
ATLANTIC OCEAN

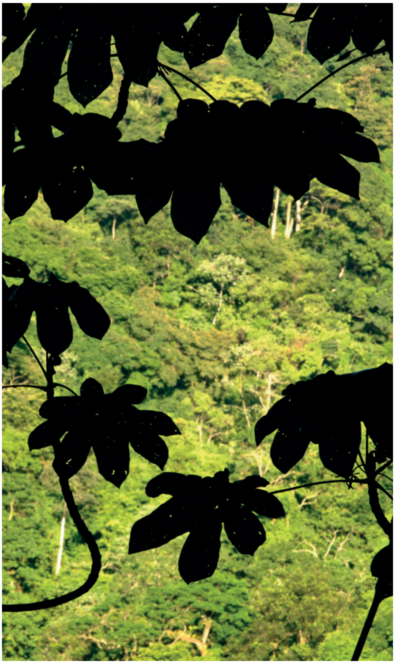
Introduction to

Trinidad & Tobago

Sitting pretty at the southern end of the Lesser Antilles chain and just off the coast of the South American mainland it was once part of, the twin-island republic of Trinidad and Tobago is one of the Caribbean's most diverse and underexplored destinations. Best known as the home and heart of West Indian Carnival and the place where calypso, soca and steel pan were invented, T&T is a cultural pacemaker for the eastern Caribbean. The islands' spectacular forests, savannahs and reefs harbour a huge array of animal, plant and birdlife, and the endless undeveloped beaches are some of the prettiest in the region, from palm-lined white sand fringed by limpid waters to secluded, wave-whipped outcrops.

Trinidad and Tobago are well suited to independent travellers without being fully fledged resorts, and because gas and oil (rather than tourism) are the main economic earners, both islands remain largely unfettered by the more noxious elements of Caribbean tourism. Visitors are not corralled in all-inclusives or holed-up on private swathes of sand, and the beaches are enjoyed by both local and foreign holidaymakers. Sun and sea are by no means the only draw here, however: no other Caribbean location offers such a variety of wildlife and habitats in so compact an area (Trinidad covers less than 5000 square kilometres, Tobago just 300). In Trinidad, there are tropical rainforests of mahogany and teak patrolled by howler monkeys and ocelots, wetlands harbouring manatees and anacondas, and remote beaches where giant leatherback turtles lay their eggs, while Tobago is best known for its stunning coral reefs, favoured by manta rays and shoals of brightly coloured tropical fish – and both islands have plenty of lovely waterfalls in which to beat the heat. And with more than 430 brilliantly hued species recorded here (one of the richest concentrations per square kilometre in the world), T&T also offer some brilliant opportunities for birdwatching.

The crowded and dynamic towns and cities are equally engaging, with fretworked "gingerbread" homes sitting side by side with temples, mosques, Catholic cathedrals and Anglican churches. The many ethnic groups brought to labour in the islands after the slaves were freed in 1834 have given rise to a remarkably varied populace, hailing from India, China, Portugal and Syria as well as Africa, England, France and Spain. Though racial tensions are inevitably present, Trinbagonians (as they're collectively known) generally coexist with good humour, and are proud of the multiculturalism that has so enriched the life of the nation. This easy-going mentality is best expressed in the local propensity for liming – taking time out to meet friends and talk, usually over a beer or glass of rum.



▲ Northern Range forest, Trinidad

Fact file

- Standing at about 1.3 million, Trinidad and Tobago's **population** is around 40 percent Indian, 39 percent black, 18.4 percent mixed-race, 0.6 percent white and 0.4 percent Chinese.
- With 26 percent of its population Roman Catholic, 24.6 percent Protestant, 22.5 percent Hindu, 5.8 percent Muslim, 3.3 percent Presbyterian and 5.6 percent adhered to African-based **religions** such as Spiritual Baptist and Orisha, T&T is the Caribbean's most theologically diverse nation.
- The islands boast one of the highest **literacy rates** in the Western Hemisphere, at 99 percent.
- The Trinidad and Tobago **economy** is the most diversified and industrialized in the English-speaking Caribbean. As well as exporting fruit, vegetables, sugar cane and manufactured goods, T&T produces an average of 154,000 barrels of **oil** and 115.2 million cubic metres of **natural gas** each year.
- The **Pitch Lake**, at La Brea on Trinidad's southwestern coast, is the world's largest natural reservoir of asphalt.
- As the southernmost islands in the Caribbean chain, T&T lie outside the region's **hurricane** belt, and haven't suffered a big blast since Flora in 1963. The islands are susceptible to **earthquakes**, however, with minor tremors occurring at an average of one a month.

Feeding off from the party-hard ethic is an electrifying music scene that rivals even that of Jamaica. T&T is the birthplace of calypso and the more fast-paced soca, as well as that quintessential sound of the Caribbean, the steel pan; you'll hear plenty of all three year-round, but especially during the republic's most famous party, its annual pre-Lenten Carnival. During this unique and explosive event, the no-holds-barred debauchery of opening night Jouvert celebrations is followed by two days of pure joy as 5000-strong bands of intricately costumed revellers take to the streets in a celebration of life.

Where to go

Bound together for the convenience of the British empire, Trinidad and Tobago are vastly different places. Trinidad offers culture, ethnic diversity, music, clubs, great food, pristine rainforest and a wealth of undeveloped beaches. Tobago is more of a conventional Caribbean resort, with busy strips of white sand and hotels of every stripe, as well as plenty of bars, restaurants and places to dance under the stars. It's impossible to get a full picture of T&T without visiting both islands, but regular and inexpensive plane and ferry services between the two make it easy to see the best of each even during a short stay.

▲ Sunday School

▲ Beach vendor, Maracas Bay, Trinidad

A visit to **Trinidad** will inevitably begin in **Port of Spain**, the vibrant capital which, with its restaurants, nightlife and accommodation, is a natural base from which to explore the rest of the country. To the west, **Chaguaramas** is the capital's playground as well as the jumping-off point for boat trips to the rocky, wooded islands of the **Bocas**.

A sweeping curve of powdery sand and powerful waves, **Maracas Bay** is the first of many lovely beaches along the north coast, some reachable by road, others only on foot. Inland, the densely forested peaks of the **Northern Range** offer excellent hiking and birdwatching opportunities. South of the hills, the traffic-choked Eastern Main Road links the capital with the sizeable town of Arima, and provides access to swimmable rivers and waterfalls, caves, and the oldest Benedictine monastery in the Caribbean.

The flat agricultural plains of **central Trinidad** provide a fascinating contrast to the north; from the ethereal Waterloo Temple to the busy market town of **Chaguanas**, Indian culture predominates here, but there's plenty of natural allure, from the scarlet ibis that inhabit the mangrove labyrinth of **Caroni Swamp** to the protected wetlands at **Nariva**, while endless swathes of fine brown sand lined by groves of coconut palms make **Manzanilla** and **Mayaro Bay** favourite spots for some beachtime. The burgeoning city of **San Fernando** is a friendly base from which to explore the largely unvisited "deep south", where modern oil towns such as **Fyzabad** contrast with the picturesque fishing villages of **Cedros** and **Erin**.

Most people travelling to **Tobago** head for the translucent waters, coral reefs and excellent facilities around **Crown Point** on the low-lying southwestern tip. The vibrant capital, **Scarborough**, with its market and historic fort, offers a more genuine picture of local life, while the rugged windward (or Atlantic) coast is best known for the spectacular **waterfall at Argyll** and the island's best scuba diving at **Speyside**. The leeward or Caribbean coast promises some superb beaches, from the twin bays at **Castara** to the palm-lined swathe of **Englishman's Bay**, while on the northeast tip, the absurdly pretty village of **Charlotteville** has the sublime Pirate's Bay.

Castara from the Northside Road, Tobago

When to go

Though T&T's **temperatures** remain tropical year-round, most people visit between January and March, when **Carnival** explodes into life, the trees are in bloom and the climate is at its most forgiving – the sun shines, rain is rare and the nights are cool. By May, the lack of rain has parched the formerly lush landscape: greens turn to yellow, dust clouds put the views into soft focus and bush fires rage through the hills. Around the end of May, the **rainy season** begins, and the skies open up with dramatic deluges that can last all day. The wet season lasts until November, but there's usually a respite from the downpours in September, a period of hot sunshine and blue skies known as the **petit carem**. It's an excellent time to visit, with flights at low season rates, though you'll find the resorts a little quiet. Some Tobago hoteliers raise rates during the **high season** (Dec 15–April 15), but many smaller hotels charge the same year-round in both islands. During Carnival week, however, all Port of Spain hotels and guesthouses boost their rates.

Average temperatures and rainfall in Port of Spain

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Average daily temperature												
Max/min (ºC)	31/21	31/20	32/20	32/21	32/22	32/22	31/22	31/22	32/22	32/22	32/22	31/21
Max/min (ºF)	87/69	88/68	89/68	90/69	90/71	89/71	88/71	88/71	89/71	89/71	89/71	88/69
Average rainfall												
mm	69	41	46	53	94	193	218	246	193	170	183	125

15

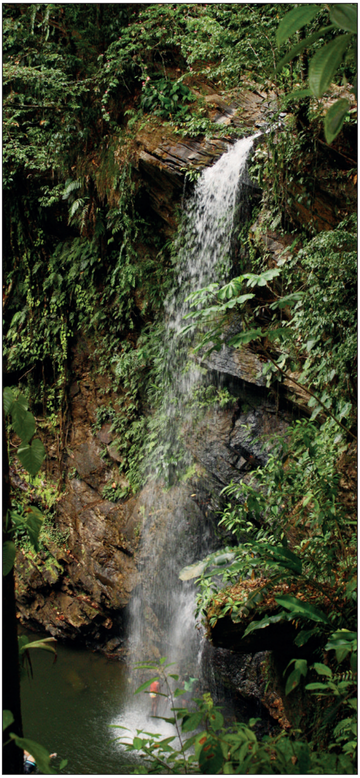
things not to miss

It's not possible to see everything that Trinidad and Tobago have to offer in one trip – and we don't suggest you try. What follows is a selective taste of the islands' highlights: gorgeous beaches, thrilling nightlife, fine food and exotic wildlife. They're arranged in five colour-coded categories, so that you can browse through to find the very best things to see, do and experience. All highlights have a page reference to take you into the Guide, where you can find out more.

01 **Panyards** Page **88** • Take a pre-Carnival tour of Port of Spain's panyards to hear practise sessions for the coveted Panorama prize, or catch one of the regular live performances in both islands.

02 Diving and snorkelling

Pages **39** & ***The great outdoors* colour section** • With intricate reefs patrolled by shoals of colourful fish and majestic manta rays, Tobago's coastal waters offer a beguiling alternative to sun and sand.



04 Northern Range hikes

Pages **131** & **144** • Trinidad's Northern Range hills offer the best hiking, with waterfalls to swim in, caves to explore and hundreds of trails through lush, steaming forest.

03 Grande Riviere

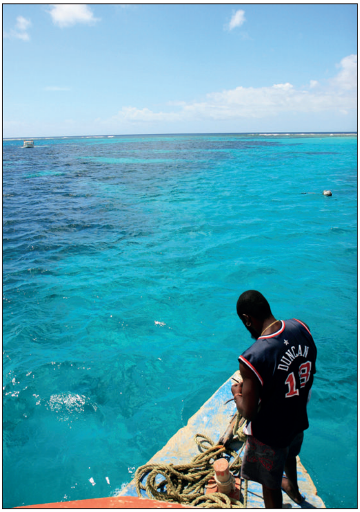
Page **152** • This remote and unspoiled coastal village is one of Trinidad's top turtle nesting sites and a fabulous place to get away from it all at any time of the year.

05 Brasso Seco village

Page **130** • The only community in the heart of the Northern Range, this sleepy village boasts some of the island's best hiking and birdwatching options, as well some beguiling places to stay.

06 **Trinbagonian food** Page **28** • A rich pot-pourri of influences has created a delicious and addictive national cuisine, from oysters or doubles by the roadside to sumptuous meals of curry or fresh fish.

07 **Mayoro-Manzanilla road drive** Page **172** • With its forests of swaying palms and roadside mangrove swamps, this east coast drive offers some of Trinidad's loveliest scenery.



08 **Tobago coastal cruise** Page **209** • A cruise along the island's Caribbean coast provides a spectacularly different perspective on Tobago's scenery as well as lunch and snorkelling at a deserted cove.

09 **Birdwatching** Page **38** • T&T is home to an astonishing number of brightly coloured birds, from scarlet ibis to majestic mot-mots, and there are plenty of places to see them up close.

10 **North coast drive** Page **120** • The drive along Trinidad's spectacular northern coastline provides tantalizing glimpses of innumerable tiny coves and rainforest-smothered headlands.

11 **Port of Spain nightlife** Page **96** • From jumping up at a pre-Carnival fete to dancing the night away at a club or bar, there are few reasons to go to bed early in the nation's capital.

12 **Tobago's beaches** Pages **214, 243** & **247** • From white sand, watersports and cool breezes in the southwest to the laid-back charm of Castara or the ravshingly undeveloped Englishman's Bay, Tobago's beaches are some of the Caribbean's best.

13 **Turtle-watching** Pages **148** & ***The great outdoors* colour section** • Viewing the leatherback turtles lay their eggs or the hatchlings make their way to the sea is a moving, once-in-a-lifetime experience.

14 **Carnival** Pages **274** & ***Trinbagonian festivals* colour section** • Whether you're watching the parade go by or becoming part of it by joining a mas band, Carnival is T&T's ultimate party.

15 **Carapichaima** Page **163** • This small pocket of central Trinidad provides a great introduction to Indo-Trinidadian culture, from the temple in the sea at Waterloo to the Maha Sabha Museum and the gigantic Hanuman murti.

Basics

Basics

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Getting there

The number of flights to Trinidad and Tobago has increased with the islands' popularity. Even if your final destination is Trinidad, it's worth considering a flight to Tobago followed by the inexpensive twenty-minute hop on a domestic plane over the Gulf of Paria. There's more choice in terms of operators to Tobago, and prices can be a lot lower. Fares peak during the winter high season (Dec–March) and before and after Carnival (see p.35), and also rise a little during the summer school holidays.

If you're planning to visit Tobago alone, booking a **package** might be your best option. There are legions of specialist companies (see p.20) who can arrange these, often at a lower rate than you'd get booking flight and accommodation independently. As Trinidad is less geared towards tourists, there are fewer deals available beyond birdwatching or Carnival packages, though Tobago-oriented companies also often offer a few days in Trinidad.

Visiting Trinidad and Tobago is also possible in conjunction with a trip to another Caribbean island or the South/Central American mainland. Liat (Ⓦwww.liat.com) offers the widest range of inter-island flights, while Copa (Ⓦwww.copaair.com) has a twice-weekly service to Panama, and T&T's national carrier Caribbean Airlines offers regular services to Venezuela and Guyana.

Flights from the USA and Canada

American Airlines operate twice-daily non-stop flights from Miami to Port of Spain, Trinidad, with connections from New York (LGA) and Washington. If your final destination is Tobago, try to get on the earlier flight unless you want to spend a night in Port of Spain, as the later one gets in after the departure of the final Trinidad–Tobago domestic service. **Continental** flies daily non stop to Port of Spain from Houston, and daily via Houston from Newark; while Delta flies four times a week to Port of Spain from Atlanta. **Caribbean Airlines**, which replaced BWIA as the national airline, advertises several routes: daily from Miami to Tobago (though you change planes in Trinidad and have to recheck luggage), as well as regular services from Toronto, New York and Fort Lauderdale to Port of Spain. There are also charter flights with **Travelspan**, who offer occasional packages to Port of Spain from New York.

High-season **fares** from Miami average at around US$550; low-season fares are around US$100 less. Add around US$100 if you're connecting from other US cities or flying direct from Atlanta. From Canada, you'll pay around Can$740 in low season, Can$1200 in high season.

Flights from the UK and Ireland

Most flights **from Britain** to T&T go into Tobago, though if you're headed for Trinidad it's simple to hop on a Tobago Express domestic flight from there (see p.25). **British Airways** fly from Gatwick to Tobago twice or three times weekly depending on the season. **Virgin Atlantic** fly twice a week from Gatwick to Tobago, while charter operator Monarch currently flies from Gatwick to Tobago via Grenada on Wednesdays, returning direct the same day. National carrier **Caribbean Airlines** as well as British Airways operate two or three flights per week to Port of Spain and Crown Point (Tobago) via St Lucia, Antigua, or Barbados. Note that there are no flights to T&T from Ireland: the best option is to take a budget flight to London or the US and then onward with one of the operators listed above.

Fares with British Airways, Virgin, or Caribbean Airlines start at around £650 year-round, with a further hike around Carnival, though occasional deals do see discounts.

Six steps to a better kind of travel

At Rough Guides we are passionately committed to travel. We feel strongly that only through travelling do we truly come to understand the world we live in and the people we share it with – plus tourism has brought a great deal of **benefit** to developing economies around the world over the last few decades. But the extraordinary growth in tourism has also damaged some places irreparably, and of course **climate change** is exacerbated by most forms of transport, especially flying. This means that now more than ever it's important to **travel thoughtfully** and **responsibly**, with respect for the cultures you're visiting – not only to derive the most benefit from your trip but also to preserve the best bits of the planet for everyone to enjoy. At Rough Guides we feel there are six main areas in which you can make a difference:

- Consider what you're contributing to the **local economy**, and how much the services you use do the same, whether it's through employing local workers and guides or sourcing locally grown produce and local services.
- Consider the **environment** on holiday as well as at home. Water is scarce in many developing destinations, and the biodiversity of local flora and fauna can be adversely affected by tourism. Try to patronize businesses that take account of this.
- Travel with a purpose, not just to tick off experiences. Consider **spending longer** in a place, and getting to know it and its people.
- Give thought to how often you **fly**. Try to avoid short hops by air and more harmful night flights.
- Consider **alternatives to flying**, travelling instead by bus, train, boat and even by bike or on foot where possible.
- Make your trips "climate neutral" via a reputable carbon offset scheme. All Rough Guide flights are offset, and every year we donate money to a variety of charities devoted to combating the effects of climate change.

Charter services (currently Monarch) offer by far the cheapest fares, from around £300 low season to £500 high season, though offers can bring prices down to as low as £250 throughout the year. Bear in mind that these planes are cramped, and you have to pay an additional fee for prebooked seating (to ensure your party sits together).

Flights from Australia and New Zealand

The Caribbean is no bargain destination from **Australia** or **New Zealand**. There are no direct flights to Trinidad and Tobago, so you'll have to fly to one of the main US gateway airports, and pick up onward connections from there. Air New Zealand, United and Qantas have regular services from major cities in Australia and New Zealand to Los Angeles, with connecting flights to New York or Miami on American Airlines or United: return **fares** start at around Aus$3200 or NZ$2000.

Airlines, agents and operators

Airlines

Air Canada ⓦwww.aircanada.com.
Air New Zealand ⓦwww.airnz.co.nz.
American Airlines ⓦwww.aa.com.
British Airways ⓦwww.ba.com.
Caribbean Airlines ⓦwww.caribbean-airlines.com.
Continental Airlines ⓦwww.continental.com.
Delta ⓦwww.delta.com.
Qantas Airways ⓦwww.qantas.com.
Monarch ⓦwww.monarch.co.uk (see also: ⓦwww.goldencaribbean.co.uk).
TravelSpan ⓦwww.travelspan.com.
United Airlines ⓦwww.united.com.
Virgin Atlantic ⓦwww.virgin-atlantic.com.

Agents and operators

Alken Tours US ⓣ1-800/221-6686 or 718/282-1152, ⓦwww.alkentours.com. Package tours to both islands, often focused around events such as Carnival.

Caradonna US Ⓣ1-800/328-2288, Ⓦwww.caradonna.com. Diving packages to Tobago.

Caribbean Destinations Australia Ⓣ1800/816-717, Ⓦwww.caribbeanislands.com.au. Comprehensive range of tailor-made Caribbean holidays, including a choice of accommodation packages.

Caribbean Journey US Ⓣ1-866/236-1924, Ⓦwww.caribbeanjourney.com. Tailor-made hotel and villa holidays on Tobago.

Caribtours UK Ⓣ020/7751-0660, Ⓕ7751-9030, Ⓦwww.caribtours.co.uk. Specialist operator offering luxurious packages to Tobago.

ebookers UK Ⓣ0800/082-3000, Ireland Ⓣ01/488-3507, Ⓦwww.ebookers.com, www.ebookers.ie. Low fares on an extensive selection of scheduled flights and package deals.

Geodyssey UK Ⓣ020/7281-7788, Ⓦwww.geodyssey.co.uk. Specialist in T&T and Venezuela, offering excellent tours that take in the cultural and natural highlights of both Trinidad and Tobago.

Holiday in Tobago Tobago Ⓣ868631-0266, Ⓦwww.holidayintobago.com. Small company, run by an expat couple living in Tobago with hands-on know-how on the island.

IGLU Tropical UK Ⓣ020/8544-6389, Ⓦwww.iglutropical.com. Cruise and accommodation packages.

Just Tobago UK Ⓣ01373/814-234 Ⓦwww.justtobago.co.uk. Specialist company offering flexible packages to Tobago with a range of prices.

Kuoni Worldwide UK Ⓣ01306/742-222, Ⓦwww.kuoni.co.uk. Flexible package holidays and good family deals to Tobago.

Mot Mot Travel UK Ⓣ01327/830-918, Ⓦwww.motmottravel.com. Excellent tour operator, with knowledgeable staff and some great tours on both islands, from nature-based trips to birdwatching and diving.

Newmont Travel UK Ⓣ020/8920-1155, Ⓦwww.newmont.co.uk. Caribbean flight specialist offering the best deals out of the UK.

North South Travel UK Ⓣ01245/608-291, Ⓦwww.northsouthtravel.co.uk. Friendly, competitive travel agency, offering discounted fares worldwide. Profits are used to support projects in the developing world, especially the promotion of sustainable tourism.

Owners' Syndicate UK Ⓣ020/7381-7493, Ⓦwww.ownerssyndicate.com. Good value for villa holidays in Tobago, as well as a few small properties.

Regal Holidays UK Ⓣ0870/220-1777, Ⓕ01353/777-897, Ⓦwww.regal-diving.co.uk. Specializes in diving packages, including eco-friendly packages, as well as liveaboards.

STA Travel US Ⓣ1-800/781-4040, UK Ⓣ0871/2300-040, Australia Ⓣ134 STA, New Zealand Ⓣ0800/474-400, SA Ⓣ0861/781-781, Ⓦwww.statravel.com. Worldwide specialists in independent travel; also student IDs, travel insurance, car rental, and more. Good discounts for students and under-26s. Tailor-made packages; 7-nights all-inclusive in Tobago start at US$1469, with airfare from New York.

TourScan Inc US Ⓣ1-800/962-2080 or 203/655-8091, Ⓦwww.tourscan.com. Flight and accommodation packages to Trinidad and Tobago.

Travel CUTS Canada Ⓣ1-866/246-9762, US Ⓣ1-800/592-2887, Ⓦwww.travelcuts.com. Canadian youth and student travel firm.

Trips Worldwide UK Ⓣ0117/987-2626, Ⓕ0117/3311-4401, Ⓦwww.tripsworldwide.co.uk. Eco-tours and tailor-made holidays to both Trinidad and Tobago. Knowledgeable staff organize flights, accommodation, transport and tour guides.

USIT Ireland Ⓣ01/602-1906, Northern Ireland Ⓣ028/9032-7111, Ⓦwww.usit.ie. Ireland's main student and youth travel specialists.

Villa Connections UK Ⓣ01625/858-158, Ⓦwww.prestburytravelcaribbean.co.uk. Customized villa and small-hotel holidays in Tobago that can include excursions to Trinidad, plus Carnival packages, flights and car rental.

Wildwings UK Ⓣ0117/965-8333, Ⓦwww.wildwings.co.uk. Birdwatching and eco-tour packages in both Trinidad and Tobago.

Worldwide Fishing Safaris UK Ⓣ01733/271-123, Ⓦwww.worldwidefishingsafaris.co.uk. Deep-sea and fly-fishing holidays to Tobago including flights and accommodation.

Getting around

Public transportation around Trinidad and Tobago can at first seem chaotic and unpredictable, but once you've got the hang of it, getting around these two compact islands is relatively straightforward. Buses, maxi taxis and route taxis serve most places mentioned in the Guide, though a few of the more rural areas are only accessible with your own transportation. Though public transport runs all night (albeit infrequently) in Port of Spain and San Fernando, having your own wheels is useful if you're going out late, and private taxis are always available. Avoid travelling at peak hours (6–8am & 3–6pm), when urban roads are clogged and maxis and taxis heave with people. There is a water-taxi service available between San Fernando and Port of Spain – a much more relaxed route than along Trinidad's busy roads.

By bus and maxi taxi

Bus services in Trinidad and Tobago are divided between large **public buses** (run by the Public Transport Service Corporation, PTSC; ⓦwww.ptsc.co.tt) and private services (most often minibuses) called **maxi taxis** – both are viable transport options for the independent traveller, though maxi and route taxis (see below) are most practical. Buses and maxis between Port of Spain and Arima are especially quick due to the **Priority Bus Route**, which runs along the course of the old railway line through Trinidad's east–west corridor.

There are several types of public bus (Mon–Fri 6am–9pm, Sat 7am–7pm) in Trinidad, with both urban and national services: bear in mind that the "Super Express" blue transit bus is in fact the slowest and often most crowded option, with no air conditioning or music, whereas others are quicker and run every 10–15 minutes at peak times (7–8am, 4–6pm), and every 20 minutes off-peak, while also playing music and offering air conditioning. Bus stops are often small concrete shelters on the side of the road, or sometimes just a sign on a telephone pole. **Tickets** must be bought in advance, either from the main terminus in Port of Spain, the Scarborough bus terminal or from small general stores around the country – you cannot simply board a bus and buy your fare. Weekly and monthly tickets are available.

Maxi taxis carry anything from ten to thirty people, and are privately owned but formed into associations with set routes and fares; each area has a different colour-coded stripe. In Trinidad, **yellow-striped** vehicles work from in and around Port of Spain to the western tip; **red stripes** in the east; **green stripes** in the centre and south; **black stripes** in and around Princes Town; and **brown stripes** from San Fernando to the southwest. **Blue-striped** maxis operate in Tobago and there is only one set route, from Scarborough to Charlotteville (the rest are for schoolchildren and private tourist charters). Maxis adhere to no fixed **timetable**, though more operate at busy periods (every 5min from 6–10am & 3–8pm), and after 8pm you can expect a longer wait. Some maxis run intermittently through the night, serving fetes and concerts, and the major towns. Importantly, maxis can be hailed anywhere along their route – just stick out your hand and if they have space they will pick you up – but it's often quicker to go to the main stand; since maxis wait until they are full before leaving, they may not have free seats until they reach their destination. Once aboard, they will let you off at any point; press the buzzers by the windows to stop the bus. **Fares** range between TT$4 and TT$10; ask fellow passengers if you're not sure, or just give the driver a TT$10 note and wait for your change.

All public buses and most maxi taxis in **Trinidad** leave from and terminate at City Gate – sometimes referred to as South Quay in official literature – in Port of Spain, the country's main transportation hub. Examples of fares from Port of Spain are TT$5 to Arima or TT$7 to San Fernando on Transit buses; other services are a bit more expensive. In **Tobago**, all buses leave from the Greenside Street terminal in Scarborough; most are blue-striped minibuses and operate more frequently during peak hours. Officially buses run from Scarborough to Crown Point (TT$3), Castara (TT$6) and Charlotteville (TT$9).

Information on public bus services in Trinidad can be obtained from the Customer Care Centre in City Gate, or by ringing ☎623 2341; in Tobago, call ☎639 2293.

Riding in a maxi can be an entertaining experience; interiors often reflect the taste of the owner, declaring anything from religious faith to a devotion to love and money, with more ornate vehicles having padded ceilings or photos of favourite personalities. Many have a slogan across their windscreen: the nickname of the driver, perhaps, or their personal motto, like "Young Adult" or "Black Man Redemption". In the past maxis were famed for being sort of travelling discos, but a law – passed to assuage worries that children were grooving aboard their favourite "party maxi" after school – now requires drivers to pay for a licence if they wish to play music in their vehicles (few do).

By route taxi and private taxi

Route taxis follow similar rules to maxis, but they rarely have a main meeting point, with stands scattered around the towns and cities. They can hold four to five passengers in addition to the driver and, apart from their H number plates, they are indistinguishable from private cars (which have P number plates – although note that some P-licensed cars also operate as route taxis and are best avoided, as you could be getting into anyone's car), and come in various states of repair. Route taxis don't leave their stand until they're full, but are usually quicker (and slightly more expensive) than maxis as they stop less frequently.

To stop a taxi en route, hail it with your hand. There is a widely accepted code of hand signals; point left or right to indicate which direction you want to take at the next major turn-off. When entering the car it is normal to greet other passengers with a "good morning" or a "good afternoon". To stop the taxi tell your driver you want to get off as you approach your destination – in Trini-speak, "nex corner drive". As with maxis, if you're not sure what you should be paying, just hand over a TT$10 note and wait for change.

Like anywhere, private taxis take you directly to your destination, but are **unmetered**, so a price must be agreed beforehand, and they easily work out just as expensive as a cab in Britain or the US. As with route taxis, they also have an H number plate. It is often possible – and more economical – however, to bargain with a route taxi driver to drop you where you want. Phone-A-Taxi (☎628 TAXI) offers the cheapest 24-hour, islandwide service in Trinidad.

PTSC "Know Your Country" Tours

In addition to standard bus services, PTSC offers **tours** to some of Trinidad's most popular attractions. The "Know Your Country Tours" are designed primarily for locals (though tourists are welcome), and are an excellent and very cheap way of getting to some of the more inaccessible parts of the island (entrance fees and meals are your responsibility).

Current tours are as follows: departing from **City Gate** in Port of Spain, there's a visit to **Los Iros** (stopping at Penal and the Divina Pastora church in Siparia), **Blanchisseuse** (stopping at the Asa Wright Nature Centre and passing through Morne La Croix and Brasso Seco, and with a swimming stop at Las Cuevas), **Mayaro** (stopping at Manzanilla Beach) and the **Pitch Lake** (stopping at Vessigny and Granville beaches). Starting from the PTSC terminus in San Fernando (though you could pick it up in the capital), there's also a tour to **Port of Spain**, taking in the National Museum and heading on to **Maracas** beach. Tour **prices** range from TT$50 to TT$100 per person. For more information, call ☎624 9839.

By rental vehicle

Driving in T&T requires **patience** and constant **alertness**; you simply cannot take your eyes off the road for one moment, and the packed streets of downtown Port of Spain with their complicated one-way systems can be a nightmare. Throughout the islands, drivers (particularly those of maxis and taxis) habitually stop at short notice, turn without indicating and happily block traffic to chat with a friend. The best thing to do is accept it; beeping your horn out of irritation will only get you withering stares; **horns** are more frequently used as a thank-you gesture and as an indication of an intention to overtake. Expect maxis/taxis to pull over at any moment, and always drive defensively.

Trinbagonian drivers are generally courteous, especially when confronted with a rental car, often stopping to allow you to pull out or by shouting advice. Some, however, take to the road at night with only one headlight/taillight, and being dazzled by full-beam headlights is common; keep your eyes to the left verge to avoiding staring into the lights. Hand signals are also frequently used: an up-and-down movement indicates that a driver is about to stop (or an instruction for others to stop due to a hazard ahead); if you're pulling out into traffic, it's also usual to stick your arm out to indicate your intent. Whatever the motivation, slow down if faced with a hand signal. Driving on main highways can feel hair-raising – a favourite Trinbagonian habit is a high-speed weaving technique which looks as though it ought to cause a multiple pile-up (sadly, it often does so); take extra care, especially in the tropical rains.

Traffic lights can be confusing; there are usually three, relating to relevant lanes; left, straight on, and right. You'll also see flashing red or yellow lights at major junctions; both mean "proceed with caution"; yellow means it's primarily your right of way, red that it's someone else's.

Seat belts are compulsory, but not always used. Drinking and driving is also illegal, though the attitude towards it is more laid back in T&T than most other countries. The law also demands that drivers be properly attired; it's possible to be charged for "driving bareback", so always keep a T-shirt handy. Road signs are based on the English system (although distances and speed limits are in kilometres), and you must drive on the **left**. The speed limit is 80kmph on highways and 55kmph on main roads in built-up areas. Tobago's speed limit is 50kmph.

A valid international **driving licence** or one issued in the US, Canada, UK, Germany or the Bahamas is required for driving both cars and motorcycles for up to ninety days. Apply to the Licensing Division on Wrightson Road, Port of Spain (☎625 1031), if you intend to drive in T&T for longer than three months.

Car rental

All companies require you to be 25 or over and hold a valid **driving licence**; most ask for a deposit guaranteed by a credit card imprint, though some smaller firms, especially in Tobago, accept a cash deposit of around US$170. You'll be offered a collision damage waiver at extra cost (usually US$5–15 per day); without one, you will be liable for damage. Prices vary, so shop around; they tend to start at around US$30 per day for the smallest vehicle, inclusive of third-party insurance and unlimited mileage. Check tyres (including the spare) before you drive away, and make sure you're present when existing scratches and bumps are marked.

Car rental firms

Auto Rentals Trinidad Ⓦwww.autorentalstt.com.
Baird's Tobago ☎639 2528 (jeeps, buses, motorcycles and scooters).
Convenient Trinidad ☎634 4017, Ⓔcrl@carib-link.net.
Econo-Car Trinidad and Tobago Ⓦwww.econocarrentalstt.com.
Hertz Trinidad and Tobago Ⓦwww.hertz.com.
Rattan's Tobago ☎639 8271.
Rollocks Tobago ☎639 0328.
Sheppy's Tobago Ⓦwww.tobagocarrental.com.
Sherman's Tobago Ⓦwww.shermansrental.com.
Singh's Trinidad ☎623 0150; Tobago ☎639 0624.
Thrifty Trinidad and Tobago Ⓦwww.thrifty.com.

Motorcycle and bicycle rental

Renting a **motorcycle** isn't advisable in Trinidad because of the volume of traffic and unpredictable driving, but a bike can be a good way of getting around Tobago's quieter roads. You can rent **bicycles** on both islands, though for the same reason they're not great for getting around Trinidad, except for exploring quiet areas such as Tucker Valley in Chaguaramas.

Motorcycles

Baird's Scarborough, Tobago ⓣ639 2528. Reliable local firm with reasonable rates.

Bicycles

Bay Sports Williams Bay, Chaguaramas, Trinidad ⓣ687 0566 or 681 8887. Rentals plus guided rides.
Geronimo's 15 Pole Carew St, Woodbrook, Port of Spain ⓣ622 2453.
Glorious Ride Crown Point, Tobago ⓣ639 7124.
Marco Polo Tourism Mount Irvine Beach car park, Tobago ⓣ639 7420. Rentals plus tours.

By water taxi between Port of Spain and San Fernando

The island's brand new **water taxi** service saves on time and stress on the roads between Trinidad's two main cities, ideal if you want to explore the south. The journey takes 45 minutes, costs TT$15, and operates hourly in the early mornings and afternoons from the cruise ship complex on Wrightson Road in Port of Spain (next to the *Breakfast Shed*) to Flat Rock, Lady Hales Avenue in San Fernando. Tickets can be bought before travel or in advance (recommended for rush hour journeys). Call ⓣ624 3281 or 657 5434 for more details.

Travelling between Trinidad and Tobago

There are two options available if you wish to **travel between the islands** – the plane, quick and relatively inexpensive; and the ferry, a bit slower and a lot cheaper. It's easier to go by air, though transport from Port of Spain to Piarco airport can be expensive, and if you have spare time, the evening sea crossing is often a romantic starlit experience.

By ferry

Fast **catamarans** *T&T Spirit* and *T&T Express* make the journey between the islands in around three hours. In Trinidad, ferries arrive and depart from the new **Government Shipping Passenger Service** opposite the Twin Towers on Wrightson Road in Port of Spain; in Tobago, the terminus is in Scarborough. There are usually around six sailings per day, but it's best to call in advance or check the Port Authority's website, ⓦwww.patnt.com, which lists current sailings. Bear in mind that the journey can be rough due to strong currents in the Bocas; take sea-sickness tablets.

One-way **tickets** cost TT$50; standard car prices are TT$150 one-way. Note that you can't book seats or buy tickets on the phone or online. For same-day tickets only, the Government Shipping Passenger Service ticket office in Port of Spain is open Monday to Thursday 7.15am to 3pm, 4.15 to 6pm & 7 to 10.30pm, Friday 7.15am to 3pm; be prepared to join the queue at least three hours before the boat leaves – or else buy in advance (essential for busy periods like Carnival, Easter or Great Race) from travel agencies – check the website. In Scarborough, Tobago, you can buy tickets at the ferry terminal on Carrington Street. For further information, call ⓣ625 4906 in Trinidad, ⓣ639 2416 in Tobago.

By plane

National carrier Caribbean Airlines (ⓣ625 7200, ⓦwww.caribbean-airlines.com) makes the twenty-minute **flight** between Trinidad and Tobago fourteen times a day. **Tickets** cost from TT$160 one way and TT$300 return; you can book online or make a reservation by phone, which is held for 24 hours – you'll lose it unless you purchase your ticket in person. In Trinidad, there are offices at Piarco Airport, and at Nicholas Towers, Independence Square, Port of Spain; in Tobago, there's an office opposite departures in Crown Point Airport. Note that once you've paid, you can change the date and time of your flight on the phone or in person at the offices.

Accommodation

There is no shortage of places to stay in Trinidad and Tobago, despite them not being the most tourist-oriented islands in the Caribbean. Tobago has numerous luxury resorts, cosy guesthouses and private villas – especially in the Crown Point area. In Trinidad, there is plenty of accommodation in Port of Spain – owing mostly to the annual Carnival invasion and business travellers – as well as guesthouses and hotels near most of the better beaches along the north coast. Trinidad's centre and south is less promising; with the exception of Mayaro Bay in the southeast, most options are expensive and cater to oil workers.

Accommodation in T&T is **cheaper** than you might expect for a Caribbean destination – ranging from as little as US$30 (£20) per night for a basic room with a fan in Port of Spain to US$50–80 (£30–55) for an air-conditioned unit with cable TV – but it's still likely to be your major expense. Rates at most places in Trinidad change only at Carnival time, but properties in Tobago have two rates; one for the summer **low season** (mid-April to mid-Dec) and another for the winter **high season** (mid-Dec to mid-April). Many local hoteliers are open to a bit of haggling, however, particularly in summer, and if you plan to stay for more than two weeks. Trinbagonians always get rooms at a lower rate; this is normal practice, ensuring that resorts get a mix of local people and tourists. There are a couple of hidden extras to watch out for: **room tax** (ten percent) and **service charge** (ten percent) are added to quoted room rates at more expensive hotels, though not at guesthouses. Throughout the Guide, we have taken tax and service charges into account, but it's worth checking whether these charges have been included each time you rent a room.

Though it's advisable to **book ahead** during the busy times of Carnival (see box, p.66) – and Easter on Tobago – at other times you should have no problem finding suitable accommodation once you've arrived; staff at TDC desks at Piarco and Crown Point airports (see p.62 & p.206) can direct you to a place that suits your plans and budget, and many hotels in Tobago offer free airport pick-ups.

On **Tobago**, choosing your location can be tricky. The upmarket touristy areas between Buccoo and Plymouth keep prices relatively high here; you pay less for the same standard of room in more remote areas. The location does make one of the most attractive bases, however, being close to the action of Crown Point without being stuck right in it; transport is easy (taxis run along Shirvan Road from early morning to late at night), and the beaches are marvellous. Also close to Crown Point and with easy transport links, Lambeau, Little Rockly Bay and Lowlands are home to a growing number of options at a range of prices, while nearby Scarborough and its suburb of Bacolet is the place to find both first-class romantic hotels and inexpensive host homes. Elsewhere, there is an abundance of cheaper accommodation, often with some of the most stunning locations Tobago has to offer. The gorgeous and friendly fishing centres of Castara and Charlotteville, for example, are growing in popularity among those wishing to get away from it all, each with an increasing number of moderately priced places to stay.

Bear in mind that there are no proper campsites in T&T, though **camping** is a popular activity for Trinidadians during holiday weekends and some hiking groups and guides (see p.40) offer bush camps as one of their options.

Hotels

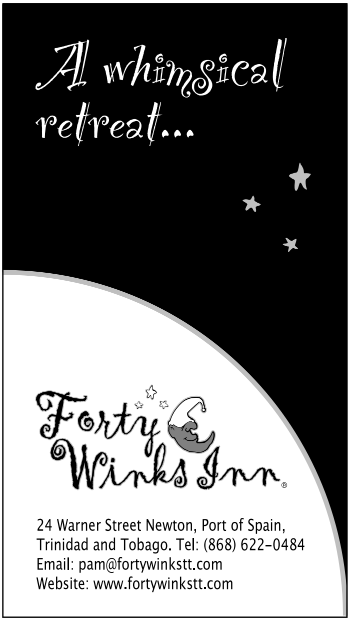
Most of T&T's resort-type **hotels** cluster around Tobago's better beaches, such as along the coast between Buccoo and

Plymouth, where you'll find expansive, landscaped enclaves with private beaches, as well as "eco-hotels" and holistic havens. In between these are no-nonsense concrete blocks dedicated to the needs of the package tourist, and legions of eight-to-twelve-room properties with pastel decor, loud bedspreads and a pool. Thankfully, the all-inclusive trend that's swept through the rest of the Caribbean has not yet caught on here. Though some larger properties offer all-inclusive plans, you can also stay on a room-only basis. You may be offered the option of a "meal plan" – the most common are CP (Continental; room and breakfast), MAP (Modified American; room, breakfast and dinner) or FAP (Full American; room and all meals including snacks and tea).

In both islands, large-scale hotels meet international standards in terms of **facilities**: air conditioning, TV (usually cable or satellite), telephone, wireless internet access (or in-room jacks), private bathroom with hot water and maybe a balcony, as well as restaurants, bars and sometimes a pool on site. However, most of the smarter Trinidad hotels cater largely to business travellers, so you won't find much in the way of organized entertainment or a holiday atmosphere – something which you'll find in abundance in Tobago.

Guesthouses, host homes and bed & breakfasts

A welcome feature of the islands' accommodation choices for the budget-minded visitor is the myriad small **guesthouses**. These are often great value for money and friendly places to stay. It is not compulsory for any guesthouse to be registered with the tourist board and many perfectly good ones are not; however, if they are it means that they have been inspected and approved. Being anything from a couple of rooms tacked on to a private home or a smoothly run nine-room establishment, guesthouses generally have less facilities than at hotels; many don't have a pool, and you could get a fan instead of air conditioning. There may also be no hot water, a shared bathroom, homelier decor and more of a personal touch. Prices at more basic options are



24 Warner Street Newton, Port of Spain,
Trinidad and Tobago. Tel: (868) 622-0484
Email: pam@fortywinkstt.com
Website: www.fortywinkstt.com

Accommodation price codes

All accommodation listed in this guide has been graded according to the following **price categories**:

① US$20 and under
② US$21–45
③ US$46–80
④ US$81–110
⑤ US$111–140
⑥ US$141–170
⑦ US$171–200
⑧ US$201–250
⑨ US$251 and over

Rates are for the cheapest double or twin rooms, including ten-percent tax and ten-percent service charge where applicable. In Tobago, rates quoted are those used during the high season, mid-December to mid-April (low season rates fall by up to 25 percent). There is no high season in Trinidad, but rates may double during Carnival. Payment can be made in either US or TT currency.

lower than at hotels, though more upmarket ones often cost as much.

Budget-minded travellers should note that many guesthouse (and even hotel) rooms include a kitchen or kitchenette (the latter consisting of a hot plate, fridge and sometimes a microwave) for roughly the same rate as a standard room. Most provide utensils; make sure that an inventory is taken in your presence to ensure that you are not held liable for breakages that occurred before you arrived.

Private **host homes** and **bed & breakfasts** are inexpensive and generally excellent; neither charge room tax or VAT, and you may get more insight into local lifestyles and attitudes than you'd experience elsewhere. Both host homes and B&Bs are monitored and inspected by the Tourism Development Company (TDC), which also produces a list of registered establishments (see Ⓦwww.visittnt.com). What you get for your money varies enormously; some offer air conditioning and private hot-water bathroom, whereas others are much more basic. These options normally rent for upwards of US$35 per room, though owners are often open to a bit of bargaining. In Trinidad, more options are available from the Trinidad and Tobago Bed and Breakfast Co-operative, Ⓣ663 4413, Ⓔla-belle@tstt.net.tt; in Tobago, contact Ms Miriam Edwards on Ⓣ639 3926.

Villas, beach houses and long-term rentals

Most **holiday villas** rented to tourists are in Tobago and tend to have full staff and facilities such as a kitchen and pool. These options can actually be quite cost-effective if you're travelling in a group; plan on paying US$280 per week for the most basic villa to as much as US$4000 for something in the lap of luxury – those around the Mount Irvine golf course, for example. Most are privately owned but represented by agencies; in Tobago, contact Island Investments, 30 Shirvan Rd, Scarborough (Ⓣ639 0929, Ⓦislreal.com). You can also check the TDC website Ⓦwww.visittnt.com, or in the UK contact The Owners' Syndicate (see p.21).

In Trinidad, **beach houses** are available in areas such as Mayaro and the Toco coast – generally geared to locals on a weekend break (you may have to bring your own bed linen and so on) – though you can get some real bargains by scanning the local papers. If you are planning to stay in Trinidad for a month or more, consider a furnished apartment. Most are advertised in the classified pages of the *Trinidad Guardian*, with basic ones in Port of Spain starting at around US$280 per month. Ads for "tourist" or "vacation" accommodation often mean higher rates, though you'll probably ultimately pay less than at a hotel.

Food and drink

A highlight of visiting Trinidad and Tobago is the chance to sample the islands' fantastic cuisine, a unique and addictive blend of African, Indian, Chinese, European and Latin American influences. It's hard to overemphasize the centrality of food to Trinbagonian culture; a true Trinbagonian would never lime without a full stomach, and many leisure activities revolve around the preparation of food. It's rare to visit a private home without being offered something to eat, and you may be regarded as rude if you refuse, though it's not very likely that you'll want to.

Trinbagonian cuisine

Although T&T's larger hotels and international-style restaurants often serve insipid tourist fare, Trinbagonian cuisine hasn't been dumbed down for visitors like in most Caribbean resorts, and you're much more likely to be offered dishes from the vast array of **local food**. Due to the islands' diverse heritage, "local" can mean anything from **Indian curry** and **roti** to **Creole coocoo** and **oil down** or Spanish and **South American-style pastelles** (Christmas cornflour patties filled with ground meat, olives and raisins, wrapped in a banana leaf).

Cooks in T&T have a far lighter hand with hot peppers than you might expect, preferring the delicate flavours of fresh herbs such as chives, thyme and the ubiquitous coriander-like **chadon beni**. Heat is usually added later at the table, in liberal dashes of fiery hot pepper sauce. If you don't like things too hot, remember to say so when eating out, or your meal may be automatically smothered with pepper sauce. If you like things just a little spicy, ask for "slight pepper" when buying doubles, roti or other street foods.

Creole cooking

In T&T culinary terms, **Creole** refers to African-style cooking which has picked up many other influences along the way. Usually served with a slice of zaboca (avocado), **pelau** is a classically Creole chicken dish, utilizing the "browning down" tradition of caramelizing meat in nearly burnt brown sugar. Rice, pigeon peas, garlic, onions and vegetables are then added and cooked down in coconut milk to delicious effect.

Browning is also used to make traditional Sunday baked chicken, usually accompanied by cheesy macaroni or potato pie and potato or green fig (banana) salad. Another Creole staple is **callaloo**: chopped dasheen leaves cooked with okra, coconut milk and occasionally crab meat, into a tasty, pleasantly slimy mixture that's sometimes pureed. It's often served with **coocoo**, a kind of cornmeal polenta flavoured with okra. Other Creole main meals, almost always backed up by a hearty rearguard of ground provisions (see "Fruit and vegetables"), include spicy oxtail (cow tails stewed with vegetables and butter beans or split peas), and curry goat (tender goat, and sometimes mutton, cooked in a curry sauce). Two dishes not for the squeamish are black pudding, a highly spiced pigs' blood sausage, and souse, pigs' or chickens' feet marinated in lime juice and peppers. A classic accompaniment to main meals is oil down: vegetables (particularly breadfruit or cassava) stewed in coconut milk.

Though increasingly rare these days, "**wild meat**" such as agouti, lappe, manicou, tattoo and quenk are considered a huge delicacy, and end up in the pot where available; these days, the best place to taste it is in rural communities or at Tobago's harvest festivals. If you see any of these on a menu, bear in mind that many of these animals are endangered and hunting is only permitted in season.

Creole soups include corn soup (see p.32); san coche, a lentil soup cooked with pig tail; and cowheel soup, thick with split peas and slowly cooked meat. Fish broth is a thin and delicious fortifying fish soup padded out with boiled green bananas and dumplings, while pacro water is similar but substitutes pacro (a mollusc known as chip-chip in Trinidad) for fish. Reputed to be a strong aphrodisiac, it's sometimes called "Man Water". You'll also see Cajun-style creamy seafood chowder on menus.

Seafood in general is extremely popular; from thick steaks of dense and delicious kingfish, shark, grouper, tuna, cavalli, carite, barracuda and dolphin (the fish also known as "dorado", not the mammal), to smaller fillets of "red fish": moonshine, snapper, parrotfish, flying fish and tilapia. Creole-style fish is usually fried or stewed in a peppery tomato-based marinade of onion, sweet and hot peppers and garlic, while curry crab and dumplin' (crab cooked in its shell with a coconut curry sauce and served with boiled dumplings) is a marvellous Tobago speciality. Local lobster is usually doused in a lemon, garlic or herb butter, or sometimes curried, while the slightly chewy and extremely nutritious conch (lambie) is curried, steamed, made into chowder, or, occasionally, marinated in lime and served raw in a ceviche salad.

Indian cooking

Though the obvious staple of **Indo-Trinidadian cooking** is **curry**, the T&T version is somewhat different to that served in India, using fresh hot peppers rather than chilli paste and a blend of curry powder that's peculiar to the islands. One of the most popular curry dishes is **duck**, which forms the centrepiece of the ever-popular Trini tradition of a "curry duck lime". Another mainstay is the vast array of chutneys, ranging from super-sweet to tart or peppery. Look out for sweetly curried mango on the seed, peppery anchar, subtly spicy tamarind chutney and kucheela, a hot mango pickle that's universally plopped into rotis, doubles (see opposite) and aloo pies.

Roti

The unofficial national dish, **roti** is made practically everywhere and eaten by just about everyone as a convenient lunch or evening snack. A stretchy flat bread ("skin") is used to wrap curried meat, vegetables or fish, a style of preparation that originated in Trinidad but is now popular across the Caribbean. There are several variations of **roti skins** including basic **dhalpuri** (with seasoned split peas layered into the dough), **sada** (cooked on a hot griddle, usually made in the early morning and served with fresh tomato "choka") and **buss-up-shut**, a thin, tasty shredded skin that resembles a torn cloth shirt and is used to spoon up mouthfuls of curry sold in "snack-boxes". Paratha or dosti is a plain roti skin.

Roti fillings range from curried chicken and beef to conch, goat and shrimp. Most vendors include meat on the bone – if you don't fancy sucking out the marrow as the locals do, ask for "boneless". Common vegetarian fillings (also used to complement the meats) are channa (curried chickpeas) and potato, sweet pumpkin, bodi (green beans) and bhaji (spinach-like greens). In a restaurant, you may be offered a bowl of peppery lentil dhal as an accompaniment.

Fruit and vegetables

Local **fruit and vegetables** are plentiful and cheap, particularly if you buy from large markets, where you'll see unfamiliar fruits alongside the more recognizable items. Super-sweet and extremely popular, the **sapodilla** is grey-brown and globular with gritty, sweet pulp, while cherry-sized **chenets** have smooth green skin and a large seed with sweet, slightly acidic flesh. The knobbly green and brown skin of the **soursop** surrounds a delectable milky white pulp, often made into ice cream or drinks; its smaller cousin the sweetsop is less common. Look out also for the sweet and scrumptious **kymet**, a round, deep purple fruit with seeds that form a star shape when the fruit is cut in half. The round **pomme cythere** (called pomsitae) is sweet and yellow when ripe, but is often eaten green with salt and pepper as "**chow**" – as is the star-shaped **carambola** (five finger) and unripe mango.

Green-skinned with a soft, aromatic orange flesh, **pawpaw** (papaya) is best eaten with a squeeze of fresh lime, while bananas (often called figs – look out for the tasty, tiny finger variety or young green bananas boiled and eaten as a savoury), watermelon and pineapples are all very common. **Passion fruit** (granadilla) and guava are often blended into drinks. **Citrus** is ever popular; you'll see lemons, limes, and exceptionally sweet oranges and grapefruit, while portugals are easy-peel, thick-skinned mandarins.

Many varieties of **mango** grow profusely in rural areas, perfuming whole communities with the distinctive aroma of rotting fruit from April till August. The most popular (and expensive) type is the rosy, medium-sized julie, while the long stringy mango is best avoided unless you have dental floss handy.

The most frequent vegetables seen on the Creole dinner plate are **blue food** or **ground provisions**, including boiled **root vegetables** like yams, the chewy, purple-tinted dasheen, the softer, white-coloured eddoe and cassava as well as sweet potato and regular potatoes. Dasheen leaves are cooked up with okra (ladies' fingers) to make callaloo (see p.29). You'll also see aubergine (locally called melongene), **christophenes** – pear-shaped and light green with a bland, watery taste similar to marrow – pumpkin, green **bodi** string beans and **breadfruit** (pembois), green and thick-skinned with clothy white flesh that can be baked, boiled or fried. **Plantain** is a popular accompaniment, a larger, denser member of the banana family; deliciously sweet when ripe, it's usually served fried or boiled, or as plantain chips, a healthier alterative to potato crisps.

Thanks to the **Indian influence**, pulses (referred to as peas) are widely used in the form of red lentil dhal; green lentils cooked with pumpkin and coconut; curried chickpeas (channa); and pigeon/gungo peas and black-eye peas cooked with rice and coconut milk to make the Caribbean classic of rice and peas.

Eating out

A burgeoning **restaurant culture** is developing across Trinidad's urban areas, from casual diners to world-class gourmet establishments, as well as some stylish places to enjoy Indian, Creole, Chinese and international cuisine. You'll also find a huge lunchtime variety in Port of Spain's downtown shopping malls; no-nonsense eateries where decor and ambience come second to the food, which is invariably inexpensive and delicious: curries, roti, Chinese staples, macaroni pie and lentil peas, potato or green fig salad, Creole-style fish, chicken and the ubiquitous pelau.

In **Tobago**, you'll see lots of variety in the restaurants, many of which are decidedly high-class, with prices to match (US$12–30 for a main course). Local seafood, curries, Creole sauces and roti do feature, but you'll also encounter plenty of international dishes. With fewer office workers and late-night revellers, street food is far less widely available, and the best places to sample typical Tobago dishes like crab and dumplin' are the *Blue Crab* restaurant (see p.240) in Scarborough or the tiny cookshops in the market. In the southwest tip, it can be difficult to escape the often bland tourist offerings; pasta or steak often take precedence over *coocoo* or conch, though it's not impossible to find good Tobagonian cooking. If you're here in the slow season (mid-April to mid-Dec), bear in mind that many kitchens close at around 9pm.

On both islands, **breakfast** is traditionally a hearty meal, ideally taken with a steaming mug of chocolate tea: fresh cocoa rolled into an oily ball with nutmeg, cinnamon and sugar, which is grated and mixed with condensed milk and water. Designed to stand you in good stead for a hard day's work, breakfast may consist of smoked mackerel or herring cooked up with onions and peppers, fried fish or the classic semi-salad **buljol**, an extremely tasty blend of soaked, boiled and flaked saltfish, fresh onions, tomatoes, lime juice and sweet peppers, usually eaten with avocado and a couple of light, airy rolls called hops; the most popular breakfast on the go, however, is doubles (see below): vendors do a brisk trade from as early as 7am. Other popular breakfast breads include banana bread or fried bakes, non-yeast rolls of variable shape that are sometimes sweetened with grated coconut. If you don't fancy eating heavily in the morning, most hotels offer a "continental" option of toast, juice, fruit and coffee or tea.

Tax and tipping

The addition of a **tax** (up to fifteen percent) and **service charge** (usually ten percent) to your restaurant bill is standard, and is not usually included in prices given for individual dishes, making what seems a moderately priced meal considerably more expensive. If the service charge is included, you don't need to leave a tip.

Fast food and street food

Though international fast-food chains are part of the scenery, **local outlets** still manage to draw the crowds; chicken chain *Royal Castle* is the local *KFC* equivalent, which uses a tasty blend of spices and herbs in the batter and also serves flying-fish sandwiches and veggie burgers; there's a delicious dollop of chadon beni-laced, not-too-hot pepper sauce on everything as well. *Joe's Pizza* (Trinidad only) is a good option, and also delivers.

However, Trinidad's **street food** is by far the best option for a bite on the go, with everything from halal meat or fish sandwiches to fried chicken and, of course, roti; all vendors are subject to stringent hygiene checks; a clean bill provides an official badge, so eating on the hop rarely constitutes a health risk. You're guaranteed to find something tasty if you head for the vendors along Western Main Road in St James, Port of Spain – open day and night. Good roti shops abound in the capital (see p.93 for listings), but most locals agree that the best roti is to be found in the Indian heartlands of central or south Trinidad.

The other popular Indian snack is **doubles**, two pieces of soft, fried bara bread sandwiching a runny channa curry and spiced up with cucumber pepper sauce and kucheela mango chutney, and usually sold in the mornings from streetside stalls noticeable for their long queues and stripy umbrellas. **Aloo** (potato) **pies** are another popular snack, as are cheese, beef or fish pies sold from large wicker baskets in the streets or hole-in-the-wall shops. A little less substantial are the selection of seasoned breads such as the addictive **pholouri** (split-pea balls served with tart and tasty tamarind sauce) or sahina, a ground channa and dasheen leaf fritter. Port of Spain's Savannah and most junctions along the Eastern Main Road are flanked by vendors selling small local **oysters**. Said to revive flagging libidos, they're served in a cup with a peppery, vinegary tomato sauce.

Creole street delicacies include **corn soup**, a thick and satisfying split-pea broth with vegetables, chunks of young sweetcorn and mini dumplings – a favourite hangover cure; pick a vendor with a queue as quality varies. **Accra** is a peppery salt fish fritter, while the ubiquitous **shark 'n' bake** is best consumed at Maracas Beach, where vendors compete to produce the tastiest version of this sandwich of a slab of shark meat, salads and delicious condiments such as garlic, tamarind or chadon beni sauce slapped between fried bread (the bake). Jamaican **jerk chicken** and pork – spiced up in a tasty pimento-based marinade and cooked over a wood fire – is very popular, with stalls dotted all over Port of Spain; it's often served with "festival", a sweetish fried dumpling.

Another popular choice is the food of Trinidadian Rastafarians, **ital cooking**, which (strictly speaking) refers to fresh vegetables, fruits and pulses prepared with no salt or additives. However, though Trini ital stalls haven't managed to relinquish salt, the cooking remains extremely wholesome, with beautifully seasoned soya mince, black-eye peas, split peas, rice, macaroni pie and mixed vegetables served in a carton or in a roti skin; check the truck near to *KFC* in Independence Square, Port of Spain (Wed–Sat), or *Chinkies Nite-Bite* (Tues–Sun), opposite *Smokey and Bunty* in St James, or at the croisee in San Juan.

Desserts and sweets

With so much locally grown cane sugar and raw cocoa, it's not surprising that there are plenty of desserts to choose from on both islands. Puds like **paimie**, a delectable coconut, cornmeal and pumpkin pudding boiled in a banana leaf (or plastic wrap) and **pone**, a wet cake made with cassava, and sometimes sweet potato, spiced with nutmeg, or the classic **black cake** – a ridiculously rich, rum-soaked Christmas speciality – are sublime. Home-made fruit ice cream, sold everywhere from street stalls, is particularly good, as is the Guinness-flavoured variety.

Sweets come in numerous varieties. In Tobago, look out for **bene balls**, tooth-crunching globes of sesame seeds and sugar, and coconut cake, a slab of shredded coconut boiled in sugar syrup and pink food colouring. **Tamarind balls** take a little getting used to, combining the tart taste of tamarind with sugar and salt, as do **salt prunes** (seasoned, sweet-and-sour prunes rolled in a dusty red colouring, often dropped into white rum) and **red mango**, which is green mango, well seasoned with spices and sugar and doused in bright red colouring. Other **candies** include toolum, a sticky ball of grated coconut, molasses and ginger, pawpaw balls (shredded green papaya boiled in sweet syrup and rolled in sugar) and sugary fudge, while there are hundreds of often sickly sugared and fried Indian sweets; kurma (sweet fried dough balls) are probably the most popular.

Drinking

Given T&T's capacity for **consumption of beer**, it's hardly surprising the national brews go down smoothly. The market leader, Carib, is a light, golden lager, while its close competitor, Stag, is a little sweeter and marketed as "a man's beer". Both taste better drunk out of the bottle, and both are available on draught. Other local lagers like Samba, or Guyanese Polar, have yet to make much impact.

Guinness is brewed in Trinidad but, though bitter and refreshing, it bears little similarity to versions elsewhere – a couple of places in Port of Spain do serve draught Guinness in cans. The sweeter Royal Extra or Mackeson stouts are excellent local alternatives.

Both dark (or "red") and white **rum** are downed with equal enthusiasm, the white tending to be less abrasively strong than the overproof brands of other islands; regular T&T rums are 43 percent alcohol. The most popular brands are Old Oak and Vat 19 white and gold rums, and Black Label red rum. Angostura Premium White is a little higher in quality; the best local rum is the delicious **Angostura 1919**, a dark, aged rum with lovely molasses undertones; **Royal Oak** is a less pricey and pretty tasty alternative. At 75 percent alcohol, **puncheon rum** is fully abrasive and mostly favoured by rheumy-eyed old men. Though it's illegal to produce and possess, home-produced cane spirit – called bush rum, **babash** or mountain dew – is eternally popular, with a distinctive engine-oil aroma, a strangely pleasant taste and a wicked kick (it's rumoured to be strong enough to make ice sink to the bottom of the glass), but to be safe, avoid it – it produces a horrific hangover. Many drink their rum straight or with water, but Coke, tonic and coconut water are all excellent mixers, and a splash of **Angostura bitters** (see box, p.89) provides the final flourish. Trinbagonian **rum punch** is delicious, though, using blended fruits, syrup, bitters and a generous topping of ground nutmeg and/or cinnamon; most bars also offer the usual range of fruity cocktails – frozen margaritas are particularly good.

Sweet and strong **home-made wines** – cashew, banana, aloes, hibiscus and so on – are excellent if you can get your hands on them; imported wine is widely available, though it's usually expensive. Brand-name spirits like Johnny Walker whisky and Absolut or Grey Goose vodka are expensive and much loved by local drinkers; local alternatives (such as Blu vodka) are fairly acceptable. Imported Jamaican coconut rum is a favourite tipple, and local Mokatika coffee liqueur is a worthy after-dinner drink, often mixed with milk.

In terms of local soft drinks, there's the energy-boosting Ginseng-Up; delicious Carib Shandy, in sorrel and ginger varieties; LLB, a mix of lime, lemon and bitters that makes a good mixer for spirits; and Bentley, a refreshing bitter lemon soda. There's also Green Sands, a tasty shandy. The best thing for the heat, however, is mineral-packed fresh **coconut water**, sold in water or jelly varieties. Vendors – such as at Port of Spain's Savannah – chop off the outer husk to expose a drinking hole (use a straw as the juice stains clothing), and then hack the nut in two so you can scoop out the delicious jelly.

Made from boiled tree bark, cloves and aniseed, reddish-brown (sometimes yellow) **mauby** is wonderfully bitter, but an acquired taste. Other unusual drinks include tart, deep cerise **sorrel**, enjoyed at Christmas with a dash of rum, and the strong **poncha crema**, an eggnog boosted with plenty of rum. **Sea moss**, a white and glutinous preparation made from sea moss and milk, is widely believed to enhance sexual performance; other stamina-inducing potions are the "bomb", a blended concoction of Guinness, nutmeg and condensed milk or a carton of Supligen energy drink. Cinnamon- and nutmeg-infused carrot juice and **peanut punch**, blended with condensed milk, are a meal in themselves, sold from stalls across the islands. Check *Hardline Vegetarian* and *Mother Nature* in Port of Spain (see p.92) for blended juice drinks; aside from wonderful fig, pineapple or beetroot blends, they also sell channa, okra and male or female "sex" punches.

The media

Dipping into the local media is an excellent way to acclimatize yourself to the nation's cultural and political life. Outspoken columnists, scurrilous newspaper headlines, and local programming on TV, all offer a fascinating picture of Trini society – especially during Carnival, when TV shows preview costumes, road march songs and fetes, and the papers hotly debate the merits of the year's calypsos.

Print and online

Trinidad's main **daily newspapers** are the *Trinidad Guardian* (ⓦwww.guardian.co.tt), a vaguely high-brow tome with a rather conservative attitude, the *Express* (ⓦwww.trinidadexpress.com) and *Newsday* (ⓦwww.newsday.co.tt); the latter two are picture-dominated with plenty of space for their sometimes outspoken columnists – look out especially for B.C. Pires's brilliant Friday column in the *Express*, and Kevin Baldeosingh's writing in *Newsday*. All of the dailies have fat weekend editions with extended music, lifestyle and kiddies' features, but the selection of salacious weekend **scandal rags** – *The Bomb*, *Blast*, *Heat*, *TnT Mirror* and particularly *Sunday Punch* – are incredibly popular. All carry hysterical headlines and plenty of bikini-clad women, as well as some wicked political satire and thinly disguised attacks on public figures. **Tobago** boasts only one paper, *Tobago News* (ⓦwww.thetobagonews.com), which is published on Fridays and concentrates on local sports, events and entertainment.

Sold at Piarco and Crown Point airports, supermarkets and book stores, **foreign magazines** – *Time*, *Newsweek*, *Cosmopolitan* and the like – are easy to find, but foreign newspapers – except for *USA Today* – are practically nonexistent. Of the **local glossies**, lifestyle and culture magazine *Mako* is worth a look, while Carnival souvenir magazines provide a good insight into T&T's biggest festival; all are sold in pharmacies and supermarkets. Newspapers are sold at petrol stations, supermarkets, pharmacies and by street vendors.

T&Ts wittiest bloggers are promoted online at ⓦwww.globalvoicesonline.org/-/world/americas/trinidad-tobago, while the most interesting news stories of the day from papers and news blogs are listed on ⓦwww.allyuh.com and www.trinidadandtobagonews.com. Finally, ⓦmeppublishers.blogspot.com is excellent on culture and current affairs, from the publishers of award-winning magazine *Caribbean Beat*.

TV and radio

Trinidad and Tobago have several **TV stations**: TV6, TIC, ieTV, CNMG-TV and CMC TV, tending to show American soaps, sit-coms and game shows alongside educational and homegrown programmes. The main **local news** (with some international stories) is shown on TV6 at 7pm and 10pm. The best programming comes from the brilliant **Gayelle** (ⓦwww.gayelletv.com), which broadcasts only locally produced material: great if you can deal with the occasionally low production values. Synergy (ⓦwww.synergytv.net) is a music-oriented channel that broadcasts local stageshows and music videos. Cable TV is universally available and many hotels also have satellite TV; look out for Tempo, MTV's Caribbean offshoot.

Radio is hugely popular, keeping the nation tapping its collective feet and serving as a source of information on upcoming events and parties. From November until Ash Wednesday, most stations are entirely devoted to soca and calypso, but after Carnival the mood switches abruptly and you'll hear reggae, R&B, hip-hop, rock and the inevitable "slow jams". The best stations for **contemporary local music** are Soca 91.9 (ⓦwww.919socafm.com), Red 96.7 (ⓦwww.red967fm.com), and WEFM (With Energy For Music; has a great breakfast show), while numerous others broadcast

East Indian music, chutney and chat. Tobago's Radio Tambrin – 92.7FM – (ⓦwww.tambrintobago.com) is an excellent way of keeping informed. For Trini stations on the net, visit ⓦwww.triniradio.net.

Festivals and public holidays

Trinbagonians have a well-deserved reputation for partying. No religious event passes without festivity, and on the thirteen public holidays, banks and workplaces close and many take the opportunity to enjoy the country's beaches. Concerts are organized, shops have holiday sales and the newspapers are full of events and articles relating to the celebrations.

Public holidays embody T&T's cultural and ethnic diversity, acknowledging Hindus, Muslims, Baptists, Roman Catholics, trade unions, and people of African and Indian descent. Every year there is a debate whether the Chinese should be given a day for Chinese New Year, and frequent discussion, too, as to whether the country has too many days off – but no politician is likely to risk offending a sector of the community by cancelling one. Other celebrations also function as public holidays, though they are not officially recognized as such. The most famous holiday is **Carnival**, held on the Monday and Tuesday before Lent. In Trinidad, especially in Port of Spain, everything shuts down for both days, and usually for Ash Wednesday as well, to allow for recovery. For more on what's on, look at ⓦwww.gotrinidadandtobago.com, and see the "Festivals" colour section.

Most celebrations entail audience participation, such as dancing, singing along to songs and eating, while street festivals feature local artists, good food and lots of music, from rhythm sections to sound systems or steel pan. Religious days are also celebrated in small ways, even by those who are not followers of the religion – many Trinbagonians will light a *deya* for the Hindu festival Diwali, then the next week light a candle for the Roman Catholic celebration of All Souls' day.

Festival calendar

January

New Year's Day A day usually spent recovering from the festivities of "Old Year's Night" (as New Year's Eve is known here), though it signals the start of the year's round of Carnival fetes, and usually, the opening of Port of Spain's calypso tents, where lyricists compete in a battle of wit and satire in the run-up to the Calypso Monarch Competition.

Hosay This Islamic festival changes date every year, moving between January and June. A spectacular procession of handmade tombs and excellent tassa drumming, though the party elements are frowned upon by Muslim clerics. The biggest event takes place in the Port of Spain suburb of St James, though it is also celebrated in Curepe, Tunapuna, Couva and Cedros. See p.85.

February

Carnival The country's most famous festival, celebrated nationwide with fetes, pan and calypso competitions and costumed street processions. Dates as follows: 2011 March 7 & 8; 2012 Feb 20 & 21 (for a detailed description see pp.274–277).

Tobago Carnival Regatta ⓦwww.sailweek.com. Drawing yachties from across the Caribbean, most events in this sailing regatta are held around Pigeon Point, Mount Irvine and Stone Haven in Tobago.

March

Phagwah Celebrated in March or early April, this festival is best seen in central Trinidad. It's not a public holiday, but many Trinis of all backgrounds

Public holidays in T&T

Note that the Monday and Tuesday of Carnival as well as Ash Wednesday are also observed as public holidays. The dates of Hindu and Muslim festivals vary according to phases of the moon and other astronomical observations. When a public holiday falls on a Sunday, it is observed on the Monday, and when two holidays fall on the same date the following day is also given.

Jan 1 New Year's Day
March 30 Shouter Baptist Liberation Day
March/April Good Friday & Easter Monday
May 30 Indian Arrival Day
May/June Corpus Christi
June 19 Labour Day
Aug 1 Emancipation Day
Aug 31 Independence Day
Aug/Sept Eid ul Fitr
Sept 24 Republic Day
Sept/Oct/Nov Divali
Dec 25 Christmas Day
Dec 26 Boxing Day

participate. Based on the Indian tradition of Holi, which celebrates the arrival of spring, it's grown in popularity to become the Hindu equivalent of Carnival. See p.162 for more details.

Good Friday and Easter Monday are days when people make enormous meals, visit relatives and head to the beach. On the Tuesday after Easter in Buccoo on Tobago, crab and goat races are held, a bizarre and entertaining spectacle (see p.223). In Trinidad, the skies above the Savannah glitter with kites on Easter weekend, with a competition for the biggest and best.

Tobago International Game Fishing Tournament (ⓦtgft.com) Big boats go after big fish from Charlotteville.

Panyard Sensations Panyard concerts from the best of Trinidad's steel bands.

Shouter Baptist Liberation Day March 30. A relatively new public holiday in recognition of the African-based religion that suffered persecution in colonial Trinidad (for more on Shouter (or Spiritual) Baptists see p.268).

April

Rapso Fest Usually starting after Easter, features lots of concerts by Rapso artists (see also p.284) and offers workshops for aspiring Rapso singers, culminating in the "Breaking New Ground" concert in Port of Spain.

La Divina Pastora Held on the third Sunday after Easter in Siparia in southern Trinidad. The Black Virgin statue is carried in a procession through the town, while locals, decked out in new clothes, celebrate the event with feasting and merrymaking (see p.193).

Pont Fortin Borough Day More a series of events than a day, from exhibitions, parties and concerts to beauty pageants, all of which culminate in a Jouvert (see p.83) and mas (masquerade) on the streets in early May, followed by a beach cooldown the next day.

Pan in the 21st Century Steel-band competition with a final held in the Jean Pierre Complex, Port of Spain.

Tobago Jazz Festival Though not as big as it once was (Stevie Wonder, Diana Ross and Elton John appeared in 2007/8), this music festival still takes place with international and local artists performing on both islands; the main stage is at Plymouth. See the TDC (see p.54) and Caribbean Beat (see p.54) websites for more details.

May

Ganga Dashara A Hindu river festival held on May 17 in Blanchisseuse, Trinidad.

Indian Arrival Day May 30. This public holiday commemorates the 1845 arrival of the first indentured Indian labourers in Trinidad (for more see p.164 & p.267).

June

Red Earth Festival Eco/arts festival staged in the lovely surrounds of Tucker Valley in Chaguaramas, Trinidad, featuring acoustic concerts, plays, film, dance and the odd party.

We Beat ⓦwww.webeat.org. Held in and around the Amphitheatre on Western Main Road in St James, Port of Spain, with a huge range of concerts, parties and other events – expect lots of pan, too.

Corpus Christi June 10. A Catholic public holiday, celebrated with processions in small villages, though a quiet day in urban areas.

Labour Day June 19. A public holiday held in recognition of trade unions and workers. It is most publicly celebrated in Fyzabad in southern Trinidad, where the powerful Oil Workers' Union (see p.195) was established.

St Peter's Day June 29 (or nearest weekend). Celebrated in fishing communities throughout T&T, with huge fetes on the beaches and pots of fish broth sustaining hours of dancing. Charlotteville Fisherman's Fete at Man O' War Bay beach, Tobago, is the wildest all-night bash.

July

Tobago Heritage Festival Held in the last two weeks of July all over the island. Festivities include a traditional calypso competition, an "old-time" Tobago wedding ceremony and sports events.

August

Emancipation Day August 1. The 1834 abolition of slavery is commemorated with a procession through Port of Spain. Celebrations were originally called Columbus's Discovery Day but were replaced by Emancipation Day in 1985; diehards of the older festival still celebrate it in Moruga in southern Trinidad (see p.197).

Great Race Speedboats navigate the dangerous currents of the Dragon's Mouth in a race from Trinidad to Tobago. It starts from Chaguaramas in the morning, but the festivities take place at the finishing line at Store Bay in Tobago in the afternoon.

Santa Rosa Festival Held the last week in August in Arima in Trinidad. Celebrates the culture and tradition of indigenous Amerindians with musical and acrobatic performances as well as obligatory feasting and street parties.

Independence Day August 31. Independence from Britain in 1962 is celebrated with flags and bunting on all public buildings, banks and institutions, while fetes and street parties feature soca and dub artists.

Crate Races Held at Chaguaramas in Trinidad's northwest tip, where participants build makeshift sailing craft – no motors or real boats are allowed.

September

Cycling Classic Festival Held early in the month: cars make way for hordes of cyclists in this furious race under the tropical sun.

Trinidad & Tobago Film Festival Ⓦ www.trinidadandtobagofilmfestival.com. Held over two weeks, with films from all over the Caribbean, plus arthouse cinema from around the world, screened at MovieTowne Port of Spain, Chaguanas and Tobago.

San Fernando Jazz Festival Takes place over two days in late September on the San Fernando Hill.

Royal Oak Derby Brings out horse-race enthusiasts in late September.

October

Steel Pan Jazz Festival Ⓦ www.steelpanjazzfestival.com. Held at Port of Spain's Queen's Hall, this series of concerts and workshops at the beginning of the month features a fusion of foreign jazz masters and the hottest Trini steel bands.

Best Village Competition (aka National Folk Festival) A nationwide event where villages send their best dancing troupes, musicians, actors, playwrights, handicrafts and cooks to contests in Port of Spain. Begins in mid-October and lasts until November when the Prime Minister announces the winner.

T&T Awards The island's equivalent of the Grammys, this event sees the Trinbago elite come out in glitzy outfits to congratulate successful musicians from all aspects of the country's music scene.

Diwali An end-of-month festival honouring Mother Lakshmi, the Hindu goddess of light and spiritual wealth. The National Council of Indian Culture celebrates with nine days of shows, stalls and events (see *Trinbago festivals* colour section).

November

Eid-ul-Fitr Has no fixed date as it signals the Islamic New Year, determined by the position of the moon. A relatively private and subdued affair, it marks the end of Ramadan and a month of fasting for Muslims with ritual songs sung in mosques. Donations are given to the poor and gifts are exchanged.

December

Parang A tradition of nativity songs sung in Spanish with a mix of French patois dating from colonial days; performed by Parang groups (Oct–Dec) in bars, nightclubs and door to door, filling the streets with rich, haunting music. Hearing these songs you might think you were in South America – until you detect the singers' deep Trinbagonian accents (for more see p.278).

Christmas Day Celebrated in Trinbagonian fashion with large social gatherings and plenty of feasting. People visit friends and relatives during the day and eat the obligatory Christmas fare: ham, pastelles and rich and fruity black cake. Festivities continue in bars, clubs, fetes and parties.

Boxing Day December 26. Marks the start of the Carnival season, with radio stations playing continuous soca and calypso, and fetes and parties advertised with increasing frequency.

Outdoor activities and adventure tours

A far cry from your average sun-sand-and-sea Caribbean destination, T&T offers plenty to do beyond the beach. The hugely rich natural environment affords many opportunities for birdwatching, hiking and waterfall hunting, while offshore pursuits include a range of watersports. For more, see our "Great Outdoors" colour section.

Birdwatching

Trinidad and Tobago ranks among the world's top ten countries in terms of **bird species** per square kilometre, boasting a diversity unmatched in the Caribbean: more than 430 recorded species and around 250 known to breed. Migrant species from South America are most common between May and September, while birds from North America visit between October and March. The dry months (Jan–March or April) are traditionally the most popular time for birders to visit; during the wet season, however, birds grab whatever chance they can to feed between showers, so you'll still see a lot of activity.

The best place to start in Trinidad is the Northern Range at the acclaimed **Asa Wright Nature Centre** (ⓦwww.asawright.org; see p.132); workers there assert that even on a relatively short visit you can see as many as 150 species. Other stops include the **Caroni Bird Sanctuary** (see p.160), where you can take an afternoon boat tour to see the flocks of scarlet ibis, the national bird and most arresting of the 156 species that live in this swampland. The **Point-a-Pierre Wild Fowl Trust** (see p.167) is an important waterfowl conservation centre nestling amid an industrial wasteland, with a successful breeding programme and the opportunity to see ibis up close.

The best **book** to bring is Richard French's encyclopedic *Guide to the Birds of Trinidad and Tobago*, which describes calls as well as plumage, habitats and behaviour. Online, visit Trinidad Birding (ⓦwww.trinidadbirding.com). Plenty of tour companies and guides specialize in birding tours (see p.40 for details). A short list of **good places to go birdwatching** include the Aripo Savannahs and Arena Dam, just south of Arima, (p.171); Mount St Benedict (p.138); Brasso Seco, off the Arima–Blanchisseuse Road (p.130); Nariva swamp on the east coast (p.175); and Oropuche Lagoon in the southwest (p.190). Note that permits are needed for some of these sites; the guides listed on p.40 can arrange these for you.

In Tobago, head for Little Tobago (or Bird of Paradise Island) on the windward coast (see p.256) to see seabirds in their natural environment; the Bon Accord Lagoon (see p.217), Adventure Eco Farm (p.232) and the Grafton Caledonia Bird Sanctuary (p.228) are also fine bird-watching sites. At the protected Tobago Forest Reserve (see p.248), there are plenty of well-trained guides to accompany you.

Hiking

Trinidad and Tobago are ideal for **hiking**, despite the searing sun – the best plan is to start early and cover plenty of distance before the midday heat sets in, or choose a hike that goes through forest. You don't have to be supremely fit for the easy trails, nor do you need special equipment.

In Trinidad there is excellent hiking to be had in the forests of the Northern Range especially around Paria and Brasso Seco (see p.128 & p.138); or the Chaguaramas hills. Of the numerous waterfall hikes, Guanapo Gorge (see p.144) is particularly spectacular. The best hiking in Tobago is to be had in the rainforest reserve (see p.248).

Don't hike alone. In addition to incidents of tourist attacks on remote trails, there is no one to provide assistance if you run into problems; experienced local hikers always set out with two or more people. Plenty of tour companies provide private hiking trips (see p.40), but another, less expensive option is to join one of the excellent local groups on their regular weekend jaunts into rural areas, such as Hike

Things to bring on a hike

Shoes and clothing

Stout shoes with good grip will suffice if you don't have boots – trainers are inadvisable, though they'll work as a last resort. Clip toenails short before a long or steep walk to prevent rubbing, and always wear socks to protect against blisters and ticks – it's a good idea to tuck your trousers into socks if walking through land grazed by animals. If hiking along a river-course, stout sandals are your best bet.

Wear long cotton trousers or leggings to protect against nettles, razor grass and insects; a long-sleeved shirt may also be advisable. A **hat** is good protection against sun and rain, and a light **waterproof** is useful in rainy season. Jeans are inadvisable as they quickly become uncomfortable if wet. A dip is very often on the agenda, so wear **swimming gear**, and a set of spare clothes is a good idea for when you finish walking.

Food and sundries

Bring a **sandwich lunch** as well as concentrated high-energy food such as chocolate, dried fruit or nuts; a bag of cut sugar cane is great for maintaining energy and quenching thirst. A good-quality water bottle is a necessity and you'll appreciate one that keeps your liquids cool. **Other useful items** to bring include: map, insect repellent, sunscreen, a good torch and spare batteries, toilet paper, rope, matches and plasters.

Seekers (check the *Express* or *Guardian* newspapers on Fridays for details): you assemble at 7am, pay around TT$40 and set off. The group can normally arrange transport for you if you don't have your own (call ahead), though you must provide your own food and water. Many other groups set out each weekend; scheduled hikes are posted in the "what's on" sections of the daily newspapers, including those by the hundred-year-old Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists' Club (☎687 0514, ⓦwww.ttfnc.org), a slightly less visitor-friendly group that hike on the last Sunday of each month, leaving from St Mary's College in Port of Spain at 6am (TT$40). Their *Trail Guide* (see p.296) makes essential reading, describing fifty walks in minute detail.

Be sure to abide by **hiking etiquette**: stick to paths and trails wherever possible, which avoids soil erosion and safeguards you from getting lost; bring rubbish – including cigarette butts – home with you, and bury used toilet paper; do not discard matches or cigarettes and make sure cooking fires are completely extinguished – bushfires do happen; and finally, don't collect plant or wildlife specimens.

Watersports

While **snorkelling** and **scuba diving** are popular on both islands, they are far better in **Tobago**, where the water is clearer away from the sediment-heavy currents from the South American mainland. The best dive spots are centred around Speyside on the windward coast, where you can see pristine reef and a host of fish, including deep-water manta rays and the odd shark. Other top spots are offshore Charlotteville and the Sister's Rocks on the leeward side, as well as the Shallows or Flying Reef at Crown Point; Buccoo Reef remains popular, as the disintegrating coral sadly reveals. Everywhere, you'll see a dazzling variety of fish, from barracuda and grouper to angel, parrot, damsel and butterfly fish as well as spiny sea urchins and lobster nestled among the coral. Throughout the Guide, we have listed reputable dive operators (most of whom also rent snorkelling gear); for more details on **prices**, see p.216.

If you prefer to stick to **swimming**, bear in mind that undertows and strong currents make many of Trinidad's (and some of Tobago's) beaches risky; yellow and red flags indicate safe areas, in their absence, don't swim until you've checked with a local. Maracas is Trinidad's most popular beach thanks to excellent facilities and a swathe of fine yellow sand and cool, clear green water; several more stunning places to swim lie a few miles down the road at

Las Cuevas and Blanchisseuse, though all are sometimes subject to rough seas and undertows. Away from the oil refineries, many parts of the south coast offer fabulous swimming as well. Most agree, though, that T&T's best beaches are in Tobago, where the water is calmer and tourist infrastructure more developed. The epitome of a Caribbean seashore, Pigeon Point is the queen of them all, with crystal-clear water, white sand and pretty palm-thatched gazebos, though its overt commerciality rather mars the spot. Nearby Store Bay and Mount Irvine are also lovely, but the undeveloped allure of Castara, Parlatuvier, Englishman's Bay and Pirate's Bay on the leeward side are far more stunning.

Both islands also offer marvellous possibilities for **fresh-water swimming**, either in rivers or in the pools below waterfalls – see the "Great Outdoors" colour section for a list of the best options.

Most of the larger Tobago hotels have all you need in the way of **watersports** – kayaks, small sailboats, windsurfing and so on. In Trinidad, Chaguaramas is the main watersports area, where you can take a guided kayak tour. Pigeon point in Tobago offers windsurfing, kite-boarding and water-skiing, as well as jet-skis for rent.

During the winter, big breakers – especially around Mount Irvine in Tobago and Toco in Trinidad – make ideal conditions for **surfing**. You can rent boards in Tobago, but in Trinidad you'll probably need to bring your own; check with the Surfing Association of Trinidad and Tobago (ⓣ625 6463, ⓦsurfingtt.blogspot.com) for details and further contacts.

T&T also boasts excellent **sport fishing** at around US$300 for a half day and $600 for a full day – though not cheap, many boats accommodate up to six, and rods, tackle and bait are included. You're pretty much guaranteed some excitement; main catches include marlin, sailfish, tuna and dolphin. Boats for charter are listed throughout the Guide wherever available, and if you want more information about sport fishing, contact the Trinidad and Tobago Game Fishing Association, 91 Cascade Rd, Port of Spain (ⓣ624 5304, ⓦwww.ttgfa.com).

Yachting

The islands' main **yachting** centre is Chaguaramas. A calm natural harbour outside the hurricane belt, this strip of marinas is a haven for yachties sheltering from rough weather in other parts of the Caribbean and taking advantage of the insurance benefits, namely the lower premiums such protection affords. Chaguaramas is also the base for boat trips "down de islands" – these are normally rum-soaked party cruises to the islands off the northwest coast.

For more information on yachting services, contact the Trinidad and Tobago Yachting Association at the Sailing Centre in Chaguaramas (ⓣ634 4210); the Yacht Services Association at Crews Inn marina in Chaguaramas (ⓣ634 4938, ⓦwww.ysatt.org); or the Trinidad and Tobago Yacht Club at Bayshore, Point Cumana (ⓣ637 4260). You can also consult the Boaters' Directory, available from marinas in Chaguaramas.

Tour operators in Trinidad and Tobago

Tour companies' offerings range from eco-oriented hiking, **birdwatching trips** and kayaking to more conventional **driving tours** of the islands' "highlights": the list below represents the very best of the bunch. Note that you'll often get a reduced rate if you book in groups of four or more; some operators will not set out with less than four in any case. In addition to those listed below, try Christo Adonis (ⓣ664 5976 or 395 0999), whose Carib descent has ensured a thorough knowledge of Amerindian culture as well as medicinal plants and mountain trails, and **Jalaludin Khan** (ⓣ743 1604 or 622 0581, ⓔindiversity@gmail.com), operator of a destination management company, who is good for cultural sights islandwide, especially Hindu temples, mosques and out-of-the-way places in the underexplored south.

Additional tour operators in Tobago are detailed on p.208–209.

Tour operators

Avifauna Tours Avifauna Tours c/o Roger Neckles, Ahie Village, Sierra Leone Rd, Diego Martin ⓣ633 5614 or 788 5755. Trini-English Neckles is one of the island's most respected bird photographers, and his tours – Asa Wright to Nariva and Aripo Savannah, and Tobago – are conducted in a comfy a/c SUV and are excellent for ornithologists, photographers and amateur birdwatchers alike. $75–120 per person.

Banwari Experience Bourg Malatresse, Lower Santa Cruz ⓣ675 1619 or 624 8687, ⓦwww.banwari.com. Wide-ranging company offering sightseeing throughout Trinidad and Tobago, plus a few novel options – Carnival, river limes, sports, beach picnics, shopping, hikes and waterfalls. From $80.

Caribbean Discovery Tours c/o Stephen Broadbridge, 9b Fondes Amandes Rd, St Ann's, Port of Spain ⓣ624 7281, ⓦwww.caribbeandiscoverytours.com. Entertaining, informative hikes and safaris aboard a Land Rover, all with a birdwatching and animal-spotting slant. One of the best for Nariva, with kayaking (water levels permitting), a walk in Bush Bush and a banquet at a local home, as well as Northern Range waterfalls, nights in host homes, kayaking,"down the islands", Paramin (with a stop at North Deck for lunch), central Trinidad – including Caroni swamp, birdwatching and rare-plant spotting at Aripo Savannah. Tours US$70–100 per person, including lunch and transfers.

Chaguaramas Development Authority Airways Rd, Chaguaramas ⓣ634 4364 or 4349, ⓦwww.chagdev.com. Waterfall and walking tours around Tucker Valley, as well as trips "down de islands", including Gasparee caves and hiking on Chacachacare. Transport to and from Chaguaramas and lunch/refreshments aren't included. Tours cost TT$30–220; see p.110 for more details.

Ieri Nature Adventures Arima ⓣ667 5636 or 685 6206, ⓔierinatureadventures@hotmail.com. Dynamic guide Ivan Charles is a pro cyclist, offering both relaxed road trips and more hardcore mountain biking, plus expert hiking adventures to Northern Range peaks and waterfalls, Tamana caves, turtle-nesting beaches and most of Trinidad's natural attractions. Full-day trips from US$65.

In-Joy Tours 2 Himorne Court, Hibiscus Drive, Petit Valley ⓣ633 4733 or 753 2775, ⓦwww.injoytours.com. Great option for "down de islands" – one trip starts at Fort George in Port of Spain then takes in Gasparee caves and swimming and a picnic at Scotland Bay. Others include Trinidad's National Museum and Maracas Bay; panyard tours, the Pitch Lake and other things south; and a day-trip to Tobago. Carnival packages available. US$60–100 including transfers and (usually) lunch/refreshments.

Island Experiences 11 East Hill, Cascade, Port of Spain ⓣ625 2410 or 756 9677, ⓦwww.islandexperiencestt.com. Lively and knowledgeable eco-cultural tours led by charming, knowledgeable guides who provide an excellent insight into Trinidadian life; groups are kept small and itineraries personalized. Great for mas camps and panyards at Carnival, and evening and daytime city tours that provide a thorough grounding in the art of liming, including live calypso and steel pan, as well as bars and clubbing if the mood takes you. Daytime excursions combine stock stop-offs such as Asa Wright or Caroni with more unusual places such as a steel-pan maker to see the instruments being produced, or to St James for roti and a bar lime. Other tours include the Pitch Lake and San Fernando, or Chaguanas bazaar and pottery. German- and English-speaking guides available. Half-day and evening tours US$45, full-day from $80, including entrance fees but not lunch, and some negotiation is usually possible.

Limeland Tours Old Plum Rd, Manzanilla ⓣ668 1356 or 774 3438, ⓦwww.limeland-tours.com. Tours are led by a very personable former sport fisherman turned wildlife lover who lives near Nariva and has an exhaustive knowledge of the area's trails and wildlife – one of the best for the area, with the option to look for whatever wildlife you're interested in, be it manatees or monkeys. Also offers knowledgeable trips to Tamana caves and waterfalls, and an unusual trek through the abandoned US army jungle-warfare training camps and out to Manzanilla Point for lunch. Full-day tours from US$85.

Paria Springs Tours 44 La Seiva Rd, Maraval ⓣ622 8826, ⓦwww.pariasprings.com. Excellent and well-informed birdwatching and eco-adventure tours with an experienced naturalist, Courteney Rooks, and a team of specialized guides. Options include birdwatching trips all over Trinidad, Northern Range waterfalls, Tamana bat caves, adventurous and soft mountain bike excursions with tuition needed, plus host homes, jungle camps in the Northern Range and lovely kayak paddles "down de islands", with a fish lunch you (hopefully) catch yourself. Some Tobago options, too. Rates start at US$85 per person for a full day, and include drinks, lunch and snacks.

The Pathmaster 10 Idlewild Rd, Knightsbridge, Cascade, Port of Spain ⓣ621 0255 or 374 7847, ⓦwww.thepathmaster.com. Well-organized small-group nature tours with plenty of informed background info from knowledgeable guides. Attraction-based tours include Asa Wright, Caroni and Chaguaramas and the military museum, while outdoor options range from kayaking along coast or river to hikes in both Trinidad and Tobago, as well as mountain-biking and beach camping. Full-day tours cost US$75–160 per person.

Sports

Sport is as much a national pastime as liming, and Trinbagonians are justifiably proud of their country's sporting achievements, in cricket, track and field – and football, since the Soca Warriors competed in the 2006 World Cup.

Cricket

Cricket is a national passion in T&T and the source of much debate; when the West Indies team is playing, radios everywhere are tuned in, regardless of the Windies' uninspiring performances of recent years. As long as you're not foolish enough to criticize recently retired batsman Brian Lara, the "Prince of Port of Spain", mentioning cricket to any Trinbagonian is pretty much guaranteed to break the ice.

Big matches take place at the Queen's Park Oval in Port of Spain, and are great fun even if you're not a cricket fan; soca blares in the intervals, plenty of cold Carib gets downed, and fans are animated to say the least. Tickets for Test matches cost around TT$220 for an all-inclusive pass to the "Trini Posse" stand, where the party atmosphere makes it a day's lime rather than a spectator sport; buy tickets from the Queen's Park Cricket Club, 94 Tragarete Rd, Port of Spain (☎ 622 2295 or 6050, 🌐 www.qpcc.com).

Other major games take place in the south at Guaracara Park, Point-a-Pierre and at Shaw Park, Scarborough in Tobago, which

The rules of cricket

The basic rules of cricket are by no means as complex as the official twenty-page rule book suggests. There are two teams of eleven players. A team wins by scoring more runs than the other team and dismissing the opposition; a team could score many more runs than the opposition, but still not win if the last two enemy batsmen doggedly stay "in" (ensuring a draw). The match is divided into innings, when one team bats and the other team fields. One-day matches have one innings per team, Test matches have two.

The aim of the fielding side is to limit the runs scored and get the batsman "out". Two players from the batting side are on the pitch at any one time. The fielding side has a bowler, a wicketkeeper and nine fielders. Two umpires adjudicate whether a batsman is out. Each innings is divided into **overs**, consisting of six deliveries, after which the wicketkeeper changes ends, the bowler is changed and the fielders move positions.

The batsmen score runs either by running up and down from wicket to wicket (one length = one run), or by hitting the ball over the boundary rope, scoring four runs if it crosses the boundary having touched the ground, and six runs if it flies over. A batsman can be dismissed by being "clean bowled", where the bowler dislodges the bails of the wicket; by being "run out", when one of the fielders dislodges the bails with the ball while the batsman is running; by being caught out, when one of the fielding side catches the ball after the batsman has hit it; or by "LBW" (leg before wicket), where the batsman blocks with his leg a delivery that would otherwise have hit the stumps.

These are the rudiments of a game whose beauty lies in its **skills and tactics**. The captain, for example, chooses which bowler (spin or fast) to play and where to position his fielders to counter the strengths of the batsman, the condition of the pitch and a dozen other variables. Cricket also has a poetry in its **esoteric language**, used to describe such things as fielding positions ("silly mid-off", "cover point", etc) and types of bowling delivery ("googly", "yorker" and the like).

hosts some international and inter-island matches. Match schedules are advertised in the media; for further information, contact the Trinidad and Tobago Cricket Board at Couva (ⓣ636 1577). There are also thousands of amateur games on Port of Spain's Savannah and any spare scrap of land every weekend; most villages have their own thriving team. For online information about the West Indies team, visit ⓦwww.windiescricket.com.

Other team sports

Football (soccer) is also extremely popular, with fanatical support for the national team, the Soca Warriors (ⓦwww.socawarriors.net) since the team's spirited performance at the 2006 World Cup in Germany. Major matches take place at the National Stadium on Wrightson Road, Port of Spain (ⓣ623 0304 or 0305); for more information, contact the T&T Football Federation (ⓣ622 4427, ⓦwww.ttffonline.com), or see ⓦwww.welcome.to/ttfootball.

Basketball is also a major sport, with US games screened regularly on TV. The 1st National Division consists of nine teams from around T&T, often using names such as the Raptors, or even players, like Shaq Attack. National team games are held at the National Stadium – contact the National Basketball Association (ⓣ623 2881). Another popular sport is **hashing**, a kind of cross-country race with lots of beer and rum drinking; if you want to have a go, contact the Port of Spain Hash Harriers (ⓦposhashhouse.tripod.com).

Other activities

T&T boasts some lovely **golf courses**, most with in-house caddies and clubs and carts for rent. In **Trinidad**, the best is St Andrew's in Moka, Maraval (ⓣ629 2314, ⓦwww.golftrinidad.com; nine holes TT$270). The only public course is the nine-hole Chaguaramas Golf Course, Bellerand Road, Chaguaramas (ⓣ634 4227, ⓦwww.chagdev.com; TT$70 for nine holes, TT$130 for eighteen holes). In **Tobago**, Tobago Plantations (ⓣ631 0875, ⓦwww.tobagoplantations.com) is a pristine course on the wind-blown Atlantic coast (eighteen holes, US$95); or try the eighteen palm-dotted holes attached to the *Mount Irvine* hotel (ⓣ639 8871, ⓦwww.mtirvine.com; US$50. eighteen holes). Both St Andrew's and Mount Irvine host professional and amateur tournaments. For more information, contact the Trinidad and Tobago Golf Association (ⓣ625 2115, ⓦwww.trinidadandtobagogolfassociation.com).

Cycling is very popular; for details call the Trinidad and Tobago Cycling Federation (ⓣ624 0384). Major horse-racing meets take place at the Santa Rosa Race Track, Arima (ⓣ646 7223 or 2450, ⓦwww.santarosapark.com). Fitness freaks will find Trinidad well equipped with **gyms** (packed in the run-up to Carnival, so people look good in the skimpy costumes). **Tennis courts** are to be found at the *Hilton*, *Cascadia* and *Crowne Plaza* hotels in Port of Spain and the *Mount Irvine*, *Turtle Beach*, *Crown Point Beach* and *Grafton* hotels in Tobago; the latter has air-conditioned squash courts, as does the *Cascadia* in Port of Spain.

Culture and etiquette

Despite the wild bacchanalia of Carnival, T&T is generally a conservative and friendly society. As a foreigner you will be treated politely and the same will be expected in return. Outside the cities, it's usual to acknowledge people passing on the street with a nod of the head, "good day" or just "alright". Before starting any conversation, whether in a shop or asking for directions, local custom is to say "good morning" or

Tipping

Taxi drivers in Trinidad don't expect a tip, but in Tobago, where many make their living from tourists, a ten-percent tip is standard. Never tip in a route taxi. Restaurants often add a service charge into the bill; if this is the case, a tip is not necessary – if it's not included, 10–15 percent is the norm. If you're staying in a hotel, you might consider leaving some dollars for the chambermaid.

"good afternoon". Everything is slowed down in T&T; people take longer to interact, converse and to serve you. If you arrange to meet someone, be prepared to wait – being on time in T&T tends to mean being 30–45 minutes after the time originally arranged, with no apology. Don't get frustrated; be flexible and tolerant and you will save yourself a lot of stress. Inevitably, though, if you follow suit and turn up late, you'll confront a frustrated Trinbagonian who's made the effort to comply with "foreign" timekeeping.

Religious faith holds strong in T&T, especially in Tobago, and this affects islanders' day-to-day behaviour. Though you may see overtly sexual dancing and hear lewd lyrics, the people are still quite morally conservative. Couples in T&T tend to be very undemonstrative in public, although at fetes and parties you may see highly erotic-looking dancing between friends and lovers; this is strictly a dance. If you dance this way with a stranger you may well be considered a bit loose, and if you dance this way with several partners in one night, you definitely will. Beachwear is restricted to the beach; nude and topless bathing is not allowed. Obscene language is actually illegal and though the law is not often enforced, it is nevertheless important to be aware of it.

It is now illegal to **smoke** in all enclosed public spaces in T&T– something adhered to fairly rigidly. Local brands of cigarettes are du Maurier (strong, lights and menthol available), Mt D'or (strong) and Broadway. Bidis (Indian cigarettes) are also available; known locally as hemp, they're actually made from low-grade tobacco wrapped in a eucalyptus leaf – no filter, plenty of tar.

Harrassment, safety and drugs

Despite the dire (and massively overblown) warnings on government travel advisories regarding terrorism and crime, most visits to Trinidad and Tobago are trouble-free. There have been a series of robberies in Tobago, but as long as you choose secure accommodation and use your common sense – not walking alone on deserted beaches or exploring downtown areas by night – there's no reason to feel intimidated. Crime is far more of an issue for those living here than it is for tourists.

In Port of Spain, Independence Square and the area east of Charlotte Street around the market are the most raucous parts of downtown, while there is more **crime** – much of it violent – further east in the hillside suburb of Laventille and nearby Morvant and Beetham than in any other part of the country. Another part of Port of Spain that can feel a bit dodgy at night is the bottom of St Ann's Road next to the *Trinidad Hilton*, where dubious characters mill around the bridge waiting to hustle passers-by for a few dollars; this area is made a lot safer around Carnival by the presence of a mobile police station. In Tobago, there have been a series of **robberies**, some of them violent, at villas and guesthouses – especially in Buccoo, but also Mount Irvine, Castara and elsewhere; wherever you stay, make sure you lock up properly at night and don't sit on open verandas well into the wee hours. In any case, non-violent muggings on the beach still pose the greatest risk.

If you use your common sense, and take the same precautions you would in any strange environment, you should find that the prospect of trouble is minimal wherever you are in T&T. **Avoid walking alone** or in small groups late at night or on deserted beaches and forest trails, keep flashy jewellery to a minimum (especially during Carnival), think twice before accepting lifts from strangers and don't go telling everyone where you're staying – or letting new acquaintances into your hotel room. Carry only as much cash as you need, get small bills when changing money so that you don't have to pull out wads of hundreds and never leave belongings unattended on a beach or in a car. Have your **valuables** locked in a hotel safe or use security deposit boxes.

In rural areas, you have little to fear – Tobagonian doors are still sometimes left unlocked – but as a foreigner you may be a target. If you're unlucky enough to be the victim of theft or other offences, report the incident immediately, as you'll need a police report to make any insurance claim. Local officers are generally happy to help, though things will take longer than you're used to. To call the police in an **emergency**, dial ☎999; for fire, ☎990, and ambulance ☎811.

Harrassment

Proud to hail from a Caribbean nation that doesn't depend on holidaymakers for the bulk of its revenue, Trinidadians are far more likely to avoid tourists than hassle them; even in more touristy Tobago, **harassment** hasn't reached the proportions you encounter in more established Caribbean destinations. Many Tobagonians nonetheless make their living from foreign visitors; you'll be approached on the beach by vendors selling crafts or aloe vera, but most are polite and rarely pushy. If you don't want to be treated like a clueless tourist, it helps to **dress smartly**, and leave the beachwear for the beach. Bear in mind also that combat/camouflage trousers/pants are illegal in T&T, something most often enforced at airport arrivals halls (see also entry requirements, p.49).

Women travellers

Like other Caribbean countries, T&T has a predominantly **macho culture**. Trinbagonian women usually go out in groups or with their partners, so be prepared to meet surprised reactions if you're a woman travelling on your own. As independent travellers are still a novelty in the country, travelling solo will lead to a greater degree of harassment than in Europe, the US or Australia. This usually consists of verbal comments or innuendo and is rarely threatening; it's customary in T&T to be friendly to strangers, acknowledge people passing in the street and even make small talk. As a woman you'll be expected to be flattered by the attention, and comments are often humorous – though also very direct and sometimes lewd. It is important that you follow all the normal safety precautions, but you are more likely to find people warning you to be careful than actually to experience any trouble.

Foreign women, of all ethnicities, usually get more of this attention. The ritual of women visiting the Caribbean to find romance (or, more prosaically, "hot tropical sex") is so entrenched that solo female travellers should expect to be approached by men with this in mind – many come to the islands for just that purpose. In Tobago, some men will openly introduce themselves as "**beach bums**", and the terms "rent-a-dread" and "rastitute" are often heard. If sex is not on your agenda, say no and mean it; giggling, blushing or presenting the boyfriend-back-home excuse will be read as a come-on. If you feel that someone has a sexual interest in you, trust your instincts; they probably do. Even women travelling as one half of a couple will likely be approached, so don't think because your partner is on hand you'll escape the "sweet talk".

On the whole, the best approach is to watch Trinbagonian women and learn. They are confident and assertive and will respond to comments politely but firmly, often with a joke. T&T is still a **traditional society**; in towns women will be smartly dressed in shirts and skirts, leaving the more revealing outfits to fetes and parties, and if you want to reduce attention it is best to follow their example. Swimsuits and bikinis should be restricted to the beach or the river – many local women bathe with a T-shirt and shorts over their swimwear (a good idea if you're visiting a beach alone), and nude or topless sunbathing is definitely not acceptable – it's also illegal. Also avoid sunbathing alone on deserted beaches and walking by yourself on hiking trails: there have been incidents of attacks on women in isolated locations. If you have rented a car, always park in well-lit locations at night and don't pick up hitchhikers. If you are returning to where you're staying late at night by taxi, insist on being dropped off right by the front door – especially in Port of Spain, where there have been incidents of attacks on women even walking a few yards back to their hotels from where a taxi has dropped them off. Should the worst happen and you suffer an **assault**, contact the police and the Rape Crisis Society (☎622 7273) or the Domestic Violence hotline (☎800 7283).

Drugs

Visitors to the Caribbean often assume that all West Indians move around in a permanent haze of marijuana smoke. Though many islanders do of course indulge, this stereotype is hardly the reality. **Cannabis** (weed, herb, ganja) is illegal to grow or possess in Trinidad and Tobago, and penalties are severe. Tourists caught in possession are likely to be deported without a moment's notice, and jail sentences and fines are frequently imposed; the excuse that "it's OK at home to carry a little marijuana for personal use" is not acceptable. Local people who smoke do so with caution, shutting windows and doors and lighting incense. You probably will be offered weed (sometimes ready rolled), particularly in Tobago. If you don't want it, refuse politely and firmly; if you do, be extremely careful about who you buy from, and equally cautious when smoking. Don't light up in the street, bars, nightclubs and popular beaches, and never leave paraphernalia lying around your hotel room.

Marijuana is not the only illegal drug with a following; powder and, particularly, **crack cocaine** are common in T&T. Geographically well placed as a trans-shipment point from South America, both Trinidad and Tobago have been badly affected; narcotics police patrol stretches of coastline, and there are "crack blocks" in every large town. You are more likely to be offered the drug in Tobago, where some visitors' taste for cocaine has provided a lucrative market. The same rules apply as with marijuana: if you are offered cocaine or crack cocaine, refuse calmly and politely. Also remember that where there are drugs, there is also crime, including robberies and muggings; be wary walking around late at night, check the security of your hotel room and beware of putting too much trust in new-found friends. Finally, do not consider taking drugs in or out of the country under any circumstances; customs officers have seen all the methods of concealment before and the chances are that you will be caught and imprisoned.

Shopping

Trinidad and Tobago offer a wide variety of souvenirs and products to suit every budget, from woven palm hats to expensive jewellery in Port of Spain's malls. Local artists create fine wood carvings, shell and bead jewellery, paintings and beaten copper pieces, as well as lovely leather sandals. T&T also produces great music and has exceptionally talented writers – purchasing a few books and CDs will enable you to carry a little local culture back home.

The widest variety of **shops** is in Port of Spain in Trinidad and Scarborough in Tobago. Opening hours are: Monday to Friday 8am to 5.30pm and Saturday 8am to 5pm; malls are open longer, Monday to Saturday 9am to 8 or 9pm; times are variable, depending on the individual shop and mood of the shopkeeper. **Prices** are generally higher in Tobago than in Trinidad. Paintings and woodcarvings may seem expensive in comparison with other local produce, but these works of art are unique and prices are far lower than in art galleries back home. For bargains, check out streetside vendors and small backstreet shops – souvenir shops, boutiques and malls have higher prices. Bargaining is conducted to a certain extent with street and beach vendors, but not in shops.

T&T's rich musical culture (see pp.278–284) has spawned an astonishing variety of styles – steel pan, calypso, soca, rapso, chutney, dub and parang – and produced many marvellous songs with strong lyrics and powerful rhythms. The best places to buy **music** in Port of Spain are Crosby's, at 54 Western Main Rd in St James, and Rhyner's, 54 Prince St (Ⓦwww.rhyners.com), while roadside vendors sell inexpensive pirate copies of popular reggae and soca tracks. In Tobago, One World Music Shop, opposite *Dillon's* restaurant in Crown Point, is a good place to buy calypso, soca and reggae CDs, as are the stalls lining Wilson and Milford roads in Scarborough. You can buy Trini music online at Ⓦwww.trinidadmusicstore.com.

Local **book stores** are usually full of US titles and schoolbooks, though there are a few great stores in Port of Spain (see p.103). Many Trinbagonian authors are published in Britain and the US, however, so if you want to get a taste of T&T's culture it may be best to buy their work before you come.

T&T has some of the highest quality **coffee and cocoa** in the world, unavailable outside the country, where the high grades are mixed with lower grades by multinational suppliers. Local coffee, which comes in a variety of delicious flavours such as coconut and rum, can be bought in souvenir shops. You can buy the islands' rich, creamy cocoa from small shops and street vendors – ask for cocoa sticks: these are solid blocks of cocoa that have to be melted, and then mixed with milk and sugar. The Tobago Cigar Company at La Terrazza restaurant in Lowlands is the producer of T&T's only hand-rolled **cigars**.

It's said that the reason the island's White Oak **rum** is not well known worldwide is because the locals keep it to themselves and consume the total production. Trinidad's famous Angostura Brewery (see box, p.89) produces a wide range of excellent rum as well as their ever-popular bitters, readily available in shops. Starting at TT$65 for a litre of white rum, they are excellent value and make a popular souvenir. Both airports in Trinidad and Tobago have a wide range of duty-free goods, though prices at Piarco in Trinidad are lower.

Arts and crafts

Locally made **arts**, **crafts** and unusual **souvenirs**, like carved calabashes, woven palm grasshoppers, shell jewellery and carved driftwood, are usually sold on or near the more popular beaches and in souvenir shops. Ornate carvings are also sold in art galleries and at individual stalls that occasionally appear on country roads. The plethora of road- and beach-side stalls are run by local craftspeople and artists who sell good-quality handmade goods at reasonable prices. You'll often see Rastafarians selling handmade leather sandals from stalls or on the street – try Port of Spain's Independence Square.

In **Tobago**, the widest variety is sold at the huts adjacent to Store Bay Beach, but you'll get better deals in Scarborough, at the vendors' mall and the stalls that line Milford and Wilson roads around the market square. Tobago Treasures on Carrington Street sell a nice line in colourful fish carvings, and Cotton House on Bacolet Street, a fifteen-minute walk from Scarborough centre, is known for its range of batiks, arts, crafts, jewellery and beachwear, and is not too expensive. Shore Things on Old Milford Road in Lambeau stocks high-quality crafts, jewellery and local paintings, and serves lovely light lunches on its sea-facing terrace. The Art Gallery just off the Claude Noel Highway opposite the Tobago Plantations entrance has an ever-changing collection of Tobagonian art, including gorgeous watercolours of gingerbread homes and local life, oils, prints and crafts.

Drum lovers should head straight for the Cultur-Barn at Fort Bennett, Black Rock, where Malcolm Melville crafts beautiful, innovative drums from mango, mahogany, cedar and breadfruit woods; he also sells drums at booth nine at Store Bay Beach.

In order to protect local endangered animals, avoid buying products made from turtle shell, black coral, conch or bird feathers.

Travel essentials

Costs

Trinidad and Tobago is undoubtedly one of the **cheapest Caribbean destinations** due to its low profile in tourism. If you are prepared to take the least expensive accommodation, eat at budget cafés and street stalls and travel by public transport, you can get by on TT$370/US$60/£35/€42 a day. If, however, you opt for fancier accommodation and eat at more formal restaurants, you will need at least TT$650/US$100/£60/€72 a day. Renting a car is obviously an added expense, with rates starting at TT$200/US$35/£19/€25 per day.

Costs vary around T&T – Tobago is generally more costly than Trinidad. Accommodation is cheaper outside Port of Spain, San Fernando and Tobago's Crown Point area. Restaurants vary greatly in price: fine dining establishments, recognizable by their plush decor, charge TT$150/US$25/£14/€18 and up for a main course; the more basic restaurants, with plastic tables and buffet-style service, offer huge meals for less than TT$35/US$6/£3.50/€5.

During **Carnival season** all accommodation rates in Port of Spain jump by anywhere from 20 to over 100 percent, depending on the hotel. Carnival season often sees increases in other prices, such as drinks, taxi fares and club covers. And then there are the Carnival fetes (parties), which can set you back anything from TT$100/US$16/£9/€12 for basic parties to TT$700/US$110/£55/€75 for a high-end all-inclusive event.

The **minimum wage** in T&T is currently TT$9/US$1.42/£0.85/€1 an hour; you might want to bear this fact in mind when negotiating taxi fares to off-route destinations and prices for other goods and services.

Electricity

Currents run on 110 or 220 volts, 60 cycles. The current is often sluggish around peak times, particularly in Tobago, making everything run a little less efficiently than at home. Plug pins are flat two-pronged, sometimes with a third, round pin too.

Entry requirements

Citizens of European Union countries (as well as Switzerland and Norway), the US and Canada do not require a **visa** for stays of less than three months. Nationals of Australia, New Zealand and South Africa all need visas before entering the country. You can apply for visas through the offices listed below or else have your travel agent obtain one on your behalf. On arrival, you will have to provide an **address** where you will be staying (hotels and guesthouses are acceptable; take any address from the Guide text if you're not yet sure), and occasionally proof that you have adequate finances for the length of your stay and a return or onward ticket. Your passport must be valid for six months beyond the period of your proposed visit. Even if you are entitled to stay for up to three months, the immigration officer may stamp your passport for exactly the length of time that you state you will be staying in the country. It is a good idea, therefore, to exaggerate the length of your stay to avoid going through the hassle of getting a visa extension should your travel plans change.

Remember when arriving not to wear combat/**camouflage** trousers or shorts of any colour/variety: T&T's strangest law makes wearing them illegal on the grounds of impersonating the armed forces, and while it's rarely enforced in the street, they will certainly be confiscated from you at the airport.

If you intend to travel between Trinidad and Venezuela using the ferry service at Pier One in Chaguaramas (see p.107), you must have a **yellow fever vaccination** certificate.

Visa extensions are usually for an extra three months, but this depends on your reasons for wanting to stay; they are issued by the Immigration Office, 67 Frederick St, Port of Spain (Mon–Thurs 7am–4pm, Fri 7am–3.45pm; ⓣ625 3571). You must first make an appointment to see an immigration officer; a one-week wait is typical. Bring your passport and, if you have one, a return ticket (the latter is only sometimes asked for), as well as the TT$50 visa fee and TT$100 extension fee. Note that the policy regarding visa extensions is subject to change, and a lot can depend on the individual officer dealing with your case.

Applications for **work permits**, which are required for certain types of paid and unpaid employment, can be made at the Ministry of National Security, Temple Court, 31–33 Abercromby St, Port of Spain (ⓣ623 2441, ⓔinfo@immigration.gov.tt).

Trinidad and Tobago embassies, high commissions, consulate generals and honorary consuls abroad

UK

High Commission 42 Belgrave Square, London SW1X 8TNT ⓣ020/7245-9351, ⓦwww.tthighcommission.co.uk.

US

Embassy 1708 Massachusetts Ave, NW, Washington, DC 20036-1975 ⓣ202/467-6490 or 6491 or 6492 or 6493, ⓦwww.ttembassy.org.

Canada

High Commission 200 First Ave, Ottawa, Ontario K1S 2G6 ⓣ613/232-2418 or 2419, ⓦwww.ttmissions.com.

Australia

Honorary Consul PO Box 109, Rose Bay, New South Wales 2029 ⓣ02/9337-4391, ⓔconsgentt@aol.com.

New Zealand

Honorary Consul Level 26, IAG House, 151 Queen St, Auckland ⓣ09/379-9040, ⓔwjfalcon@xtra.co.nz.

Gay and lesbian

Officially it is still illegal to practise anal sex in Trinidad and Tobago, and bizarrely, it's also against the law for homosexuals to enter the country (though quite how this would be enforced remains unclear). However, there is a creeping acceptance of the **gay community** and the government is under pressure to change the law. In relation to the rest of the Caribbean, T&T is noticeably less homophobic. There are gay clubs in Port of Spain (see p.101), but on the whole, the scene remains quite underground with events publicized by word of mouth. Gay and lesbian travellers are unlikely to suffer any direct prejudice but even so, be aware of your surroundings and always be discreet in your behaviour if you do not want to attract any negative attention.

Health

There are few health risks in Trinidad and Tobago: the islands are **nonmalarial**, and the chlorinated **tap water** is safe to drink (though it doesn't taste great, and most locals filter and/or boil it before drinking). There are no mandatory **immunizations**, though you should ensure that you're up to date with polio and tetanus vaccines, and if you intend to arrive by ferry from Venezuela (or by plane from South/Central America, Haiti, Dominican Republic, Asia and Africa), you'll need a yellow fever vaccination certificate.

The most likely hazards are overexposure to the sun, too much rum and the inevitable minor stomach upsets that come with unfamiliar food and water. Heat and humidity make **cuts and grazes** slower to heal, so apply iodine or antiseptic spray/powder (cream just keeps a cut wet) and try to keep the wound dry. The benign but unsightly fungal skin rash pityriasis – known locally as lota – is common; it appears on skin as circular, crispy patches or lighter patches of discoloration – it's passed on by body contact and can be hard to avoid if you're susceptible; treat it with sulphur-based lotions or anti-dandruff shampoo. Much more common are **heat rashes** caused by blocked sweat ducts; to avoid them wear loose cotton clothes, and to treat them take frequent cold showers without soap, dusting with medicated talcum powder, and don't use sunscreen or moisturizer. Always drink plenty of water (coconut water is also especially rehydrating) and use a good-quality, high-factor sunscreen (plus, if possible, keep out of the sun between 11am and 3pm).

Trinidad and Tobago has the fourth highest incidence of **HIV & AIDS** in the Caribbean (around 1.5 percent prevalence), and cases of other sexually transmitted diseases like gonorrhoea and syphilis are also high. If you do have sex while away, always use a condom – bringing them makes sense, though condoms are also widely available in T&T. For advice on HIV, call the National AIDS Hotline (Ⓣ625 2437) or the T&T HIV & AIDS Alliance (Ⓣ628 8100).

Animal and plant hazards

Mosquitoes and **sandflies** can be a real nuisance, particularly in the wet season (June–Dec). Sandflies in particular deliver an incredibly itchy and long-lasting bite and are at their most aggressive at sundown, especially around standing water. Cover your arms and legs at dusk and use plenty of strong insect repellent. Once you've been bitten, do not scratch the bites and apply soothing creams – homeopathic pyrethrum is particularly good, as is a coating of fresh aloe vera gel (see below), or (more chemically loaded) Benadryl cream.

Another problem in the forests are **chiggers**, tiny mites whose bite leaves a very itchy and long-lasting red bump with a tendency to get infected; apply antiseptic regularly to keep the bite clean. Likewise, stings from hornet-like **wasps** (known as jackspaniards) are nasty but fairly harmless, though **African bees** are now common throughout Trinidad and are extremely aggressive if disturbed; do not wear strong perfume in the bush and follow guides' directions. Never kill a bee after having been stung, as this will cause it to emit a pheromone which attracts even more bees.

Aloe vera

The thick, spiky stems of **aloe vera** grow profusely throughout T&T, and in Tobago it's common for hawkers to sell them on the beaches. A staple of local healing and skin care, the plant is a veritable cure-all – drunk as a purgative, used as a conditioning rinse and applied to cuts, grazes and burns to draw out infection. It's an excellent remedy for sunburn, heat rash and insect bites, and is even distilled into aloes wine.

To extract fresh aloe gel from the stem, cut off a section and pare away the spiky edges. Slice in half and wipe the vaguely mauve gel onto the affected areas, scratching the surface to release more jelly as needed and being careful not to get it on clothing, since it leaves a stubborn purple stain.

Though there are no deadly snakes in Tobago, Trinidad's forests harbour four venomous varieties; the **fer-de-lance** and the **bushmaster** or **pit viper** (both known as *mapepire*, pronounced "mah-pee-pee"), and two species of brightly coloured **coral snake** (for more on snakes, see p.289). It's best to wear long trousers, shoes or boots and socks when walking in the bush, and to refrain from investigating rock crevices with your bare hands. If you do encounter a snake, simply move it gently out of the way with a long stick. In the event of a bite, keep calm; death from a snake bite is almost unheard of here, and your worst enemy is panic. Bandage the affected area tightly (if the bite is on a limb, tie a tourniquet above it), note down what the snake looked like, and seek medical help – all local hospitals have stocks of the relevant antidote. **Rabies** is fairly common among cattle, cats and dogs, and as it's spread by bats, it's best not to disturb sleeping bats and to avoid petting stray animals. Seek medical attention immediately should you be bitten by any type of animal.

In both Trinidad and Tobago **scorpions** are to be found, particularly around dead wood in forested areas; though their sting is painful, it's not usually serious, but do consult a doctor. Improbably large **centipedes** can also deliver a painful bite. To minimize chances of a nip or sting from either, step over rotting wood while walking in the bush, and in rustic surroundings shake shoes before putting them on.

Endowed with sharp teeth and a bit of an attitude if cornered, **barracuda** are best admired from a distance, as are moray eels. Don't stick your hand into rock crevices when diving or snorkelling, and never touch **coral**; quite apart from killing the organism with a caress, you'll probably come away with an unattractive, slow-healing rash. A far more likely encounter is with one of the many spiny **black sea urchins** that inhabit reefs and bays; if you tread on one, remove as much of the spine as possible, douse the area in vinegar (or urine) and see a doctor; washing with vinegar is also the best way to treat **jellyfish** stings. Take care to avoid the long trailing tendrils of the purple Portuguese man-of-war, fairly common in the waters around Trinidad. Seek medical help if you've been stung, and don't touch dead ones washed up on the beach, as they remain harmful.

Take care to avoid poisonous **manchineel trees**, easily identified with their wide, spreading crown of small, dark green leaves on long stalks and green flowers – the milky sap causes skin blisters. Though they've been removed from popular beaches and signs put up where they've been allowed to remain, some still grow in wilder coastal areas, and the incredibly poisonous fruit occasionally wash up on other stretches of sand.

Medical services

The main **hospitals** in Trinidad are Port of Spain General (169 Charlotte St ☎623 2951 or 2952) and Mount Hope in St Augustine (Eastern Main Rd ☎645 4673); there are also small hospitals in all the main towns, as well as the more efficient private establishment St Clair Medical Centre in Port of Spain (18 Elizabeth St ☎628 1451 or 8615). Tobago's public hospital is in Scarborough (Calder Hall Rd, Scarborough ☎639 2551 or 2552), complete with an Accident and Emergency department, though another is currently under construction at Signal Hill. If you need a **doctor**, try any of the physicians practising at the Triangle Building, Crooks River, Scarborough (☎639 1115). For an **ambulance**, call ☎811.

You won't have to pay for treatment at public hospitals, but will be charged a **fee** at Mount Hope and St Clair. Long waits and stretched facilities make it more sensible to plump for a private option, particularly as your insurance should cover costs. If you do find yourself in need of medical attention, remember that most insurance policies require you to pay up initially and retain the receipts.

Many pharmacies stock a modest range of herbal remedies and other **alternative medicines**, while some doctors can refer you to a reputable alternative health practitioner. Trinidad's best homeopath is Harry Ramnarine, an ex-surgeon turned alternative practitioner, based at 403 Rodney Rd, Chaguanas (☎665 8041) – as his waiting lists are extremely long, it's best to make appointments as early as possible. There's also an excellent osteopath, Rajesh

Dharrie-Mahraj, 14 Murray St, Woodbrook, Port of Spain (☎624 2410).

Insurance

As Trinidad and Tobago's public health system is pretty basic, you'll want to seek private treatment should you fall ill, so it's therefore essential that you take out **travel insurance** before entering the country.

A typical travel insurance **policy** provides cover for the loss of baggage, tickets and – up to a certain limit – cash or cheques, as well as cancellation or curtailment of your journey. Most of them exclude so-called dangerous sports: in Trinidad and Tobago this can mean scuba diving, windsurfing and hiking, though probably not kayaking; read small print carefully as coverage can vary wildly for similar premiums. Many policies can also be chopped and changed to exclude coverage you don't need. Flights paid for with a major credit card frequently offer some automatic cover, but usually only while travelling to and from your destination.

Internet

Internet access is pretty straightforward; there are plenty of net cafés in Tobago and in Port of Spain, and a few scattered around the rest of the country. There are also plenty of wireless hotspots, which we've detailed throughout the Guide. Prices average at around TT$10 per hour, a little more in Tobago. Free internet access is available at the main libraries in Port of Spain and San Fernando.

Laundry

There are plenty of **laundries** in T&T that do dry-cleaning; those that also do "wet" cleaning are listed in the Guide. Hotels and guesthouses usually have facilities to do washing, whether it is a laundry service, a washer and dryer for guests' use or a concrete sink out back.

Mail

The country's postal service, **TT Post** (Ⓦwww.ttpost.net), is inexpensive and reliable. Outgoing and incoming post travels reasonably quickly (one to two weeks to Europe and the US, three to Australia). The closer you are to the capital, the sooner your letters will be delivered. Send valuable items by registered mail, TT Post courier or by an international courier; FedEx and DHL both have local offices.

Most towns and villages have a post office; these are generally **open** Monday to Friday from 7am to 5pm and Saturday from 8am to noon; all post offices are detailed on the website above. Post boxes on the street are small, red, quite rare and easily missed; many still bear the insignia of the British postal service, a remnant of the colonial era. Stamps are sold at post offices and letters and postcards cost under TT$5 to anywhere in the world.

Maps

For a good **map** of the islands, try the *Rough Guide Map to Trinidad and Tobago* – the waterproof paper will last through the worst rainstorm and all the major (and most minor) towns and roads are clearly marked. The TDC and various private entities produce free maps of both Trinidad and Tobago, showing main roads, beaches and tourist attractions, which are adequate for

Rough Guides travel insurance

Rough Guides has teamed up with WorldNomads.com to offer great **travel insurance** deals. Policies are available to residents of over 150 countries, with cover for a wide range of **adventure sports**, 24-hour emergency assistance, high levels of medical and evacuation cover and a stream of **travel safety information**. Roughguides.com users can take advantage of their policies online 24/7, from anywhere in the world – even if you're already travelling. And since plans often change when you're on the road, you can extend your policy and even claim online. Roughguides.com users who buy travel insurance with WorldNomads.com can also leave a positive footprint and donate to a community development project. For more information go to Ⓦ**www.roughguides.com/shop**.

mainstream exploration (available in hotel lobbies and at airport tourist booths).

A good alternative for those who want to get off the beaten track and drive the minor roads is the 1:150,000 **road map** of Trinidad and the 1:50,000 map of Tobago, both issued by the Land and Surveys Division. Although the last updates were in 1990 and 1991, respectively, they are still the most detailed and useful sources available. The Land and Surveys Division also publishes the most comprehensive plan of Port of Spain, a 1:10,000 map published in 2001. All of the Land and Surveys Division maps are increasingly hard to find outside of T&T; they – and a good selection of other maps – are available at Nigel R. Khan Bookseller, Ellerslie Plaza, Maraval, Port of Spain (☎672 8128).

Money

The local currency is the **Trinidad and Tobago dollar**. This is usually abbreviated to TT$, and is divided into one hundred cents. Coins start at 1 cent and range up through 5, 10 and 25 cents. Notes start at one dollar and are in denominations of 5, 10, 20 and 100. It's best to keep some of your cash in small denominations: supermarkets and bars can usually exchange TT$100, but taxis and street vendors often can't and should be paid with TT$20 or less.

At the time of writing, the **exchange rate** was US$1 to TT$6.3; £1 to TT$10.35 and €1 to TT$9. **Cambios** are few and far between (though see p.103 for details of the excellent FX Trader outlets in Trinidad), but you can change cash in all banks for a small commission. Though **travellers' cheques** are accepted by banks, they can be a bit problematic in T&T; some banks impose a limit (of US$250) on the amount you can cash, while others will accept only AmEx cheques, and most banks will make you hang around for hours while they phone through to check your cheques aren't stolen. Using a debit card in an **ATM** machine is a lot easier; ATMs are easy to find, and some dispense US dollars. All major **credit cards** are widely accepted. Banking hours vary slightly depending on the bank, but are usually Monday to Thursday 8am to 3pm, Friday 8am to 1pm & 3 to 5pm. Most banks in Trinidad's larger malls open 10am to 6pm with no break.

Opening hours

Shop opening hours are Monday to Friday 8am to 5.30pm, and Saturday 8am to 5pm. Malls are open longer: Monday to Saturday 9am to 8 or 9pm.

Phones

Since mobile phones became ubiquitous, **public phones** are increasingly hard to find in T&T. Far easier is to buy a local SIM card and use it in your **mobile phone**, provided it has a tri-band capacity. Both Cable and Wireless's bmobile and Digicel's SIMs cost around TT$100, and both companies usually have deals where you get a card and a basic phone for as little as TT$130. International rates are slightly cheaper with Digicel, which also has the advantage of better coverage, though given that C&W had the monopoly on telecommunications for so many years, most locals have a bmobile phone. You can also rent a mobile from Caribbean Discovery Tours in Trinidad (see p.41) and Porridge in Castara, Tobago (see p.246). You can buy credit from pharmacies, bars and local-style restaurants. Of course, roaming is also an option, but costs are usually prohibitively high.

You can also make local and international calls with a **Companion phonecard** from public or private phones. These are issued by TSTT and are available in newsagents, pharmacies, supermarkets and TSTT offices. Each has a security number which you punch in after dialling ☎888 2273 from any public or private phone. In Tobago, calls can be made from West End Connect at 3 Robert St, Canaan (☎620 7300), which has private booths and a send-and-receive fax service. Be careful when calling abroad from any phone: if the number rings for more than 10 seconds, even if the call is not answered, you will be charged for the international connection.

The area code for Trinidad and Tobago is ☎868; local and international operator is ☎0, directory enquiries ☎6411, fire and ambulance ☎990, and police ☎999.

Time

Trinidad and Tobago is four hours behind Greenwich Mean Time (five during the summer months), and one hour ahead of Eastern Standard Time.

Calling home from abroad

Note that the initial zero is omitted from the area code when dialling the UK, Ireland, Australia and New Zealand from abroad.
Australia international access code + 61
New Zealand international access code + 64
UK international access code + 44
US and Canada international access code + 1
Ireland international access code + 353
South Africa international access code + 27

Tourist information

Official **tourist information** in T&T is pretty poor, with no useful tourist offices other than booths at the airport. The website of the Tourism Development Company or TDC (ⓦwww.gotrinidadandtobago.com) is good, however, with accommodation and tour operator listings, and a calendar of events. See p.97 for Carnival websites. The radio and national press advertise upcoming events (especially during Carnival).

The fact-filled *Discover Trinidad and Tobago* (ⓦwww.discovertnt.com) includes features on Carnival and eco-tourism and hotel, restaurant and tour operator listings. The *Ins and Outs of Trinidad and Tobago* is a glossy annual publication which has sections on Carnival, shopping, art and craft, eco-tourism and business, along with accommodation, eating and nightlife listings for both islands. Both publications are vailable at hotels, tourist offices and other places frequented by foreigners. On the web, you might want to try ⓦwww.tntisland.com, which is one of the best of the personal websites devoted to T&T – an exhaustive collection of pages on everything from Trinbagonian beauty queens to places to do your laundry. The site ⓦwww.trinibase.com is heavy with local statistics and links to all things Carnival and Trinbagonian, while ⓦwww.trinoutdoors.com will inspire you to explore the countryside of T&T. See also media, p.34.

Travellers with disabilities

There is little infrastructure for those with **disabilities** in T&T. However, a small but growing number of hotels, guesthouses and villas do have disabled facilities; these are mentioned in the text. If you want to make local contacts, try Disabled Peoples' International (ⓣ625 6658 or 627 0203) or Disabled Woman Network (ⓣ627 6431) both at 13a Wrightson Rd, Port of Spain.

If you use a wheelchair, note that getting around Port of Spain and other large towns can be problematic. There are large gullies at the sides of most streets, and few of them have chair-accessible slopes or ramps.

Travelling with children

As most local people are fond of **children** and used to accommodating them, you'll find that travelling with youngsters is rarely a problem. Almost all local hotels are happy to accept families, and many provide babysitting services; alternatively, find someone reputable by asking around. Many beaches in Trinidad (and some in Tobago) can be risky for swimming, so it's best to keep a close eye on children when in the sea; even locals' favourite Maracas has a strong undertow. Tobago's Store Bay, Pigeon Point and Canoe Bay are the calmest, but Macqueripe in Trinidad can be quite benign too. Check with locals, and if there's a risk stick to paddling.

Weddings

Since 1996, it has been possible for couples to **marry** in Trinidad and Tobago as soon as three days after their arrival. Many hotels offer sumptuous honeymoon suites, and Tobago Weddings (ⓣ639 4347, ⓦwww.tobagoweddings.com) will make necessary arrangements. You will need passports, airline tickets, and if either you or your soon-to-be spouse is divorced or widowed, the decree absolute or death certificate, along with proof of name change if it differs on the document. Under 18s must also have a documented consent form from parent or legal guardian.

Guide

Guide

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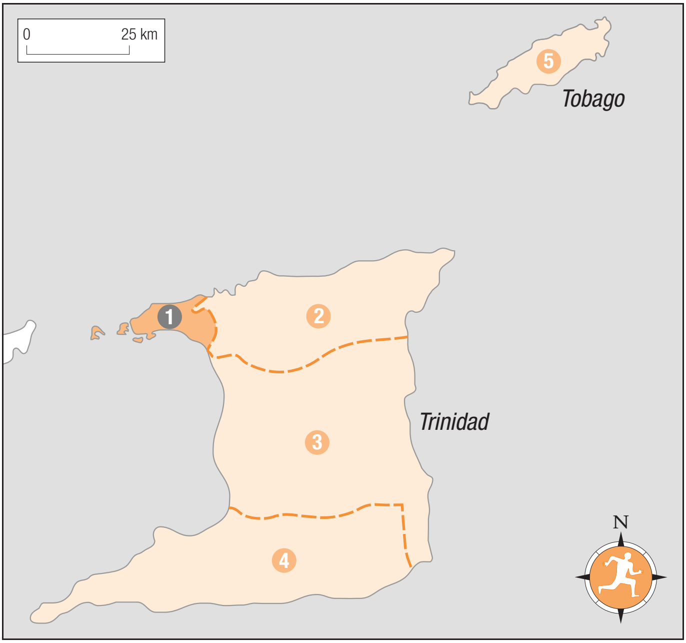
③ Central Trinidad and the east coast 155

④ San Fernando and the south 179

⑤ Tobago 199

1

Port of Spain and the western tip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CHAPTER 1 Highlights

- **Queen's Park Savannah at dusk** As the heat lifts, people gravitate to the capital's green oasis to chat over a coconut water, walk or sample the lovely array of street food. See p.75

- **Carnival** From panyard visits to fetes, Jouvert and the two-day street parade, T&T's euphoric Carnival is the best time to be in town. See pp.82–83 & p.98

- **Breakfast Shed** This airy dining area on the waterfront serves up some of the capital's finest Creole food. See p.92

- **Bar lime** Start the rum and cokes and the conversation flowing along Ariapita Avenue and end your night at the infamous *Smokey and Bunty* in St James. See p.96

- **Clubbing** Port of Spain is T&T's best place for a night on the tiles, with a varied club scene and a party-hard crowd who keep going till dawn. See p.101

- **Chaguaramas** Whether a walk in Tucker Valley, a swim at Macqueripe or a meal at a seaside restaurant, Chaguaramas is a lovely foil to the commotion of the capital. See p.105–112

- **Going down the islands** Just a short boat ride from the mainland, the beautifully remote Bocas offer sandy beaches, clear waters and plenty of peace. See p.112

▲ Red Cross Children's Carnival parade

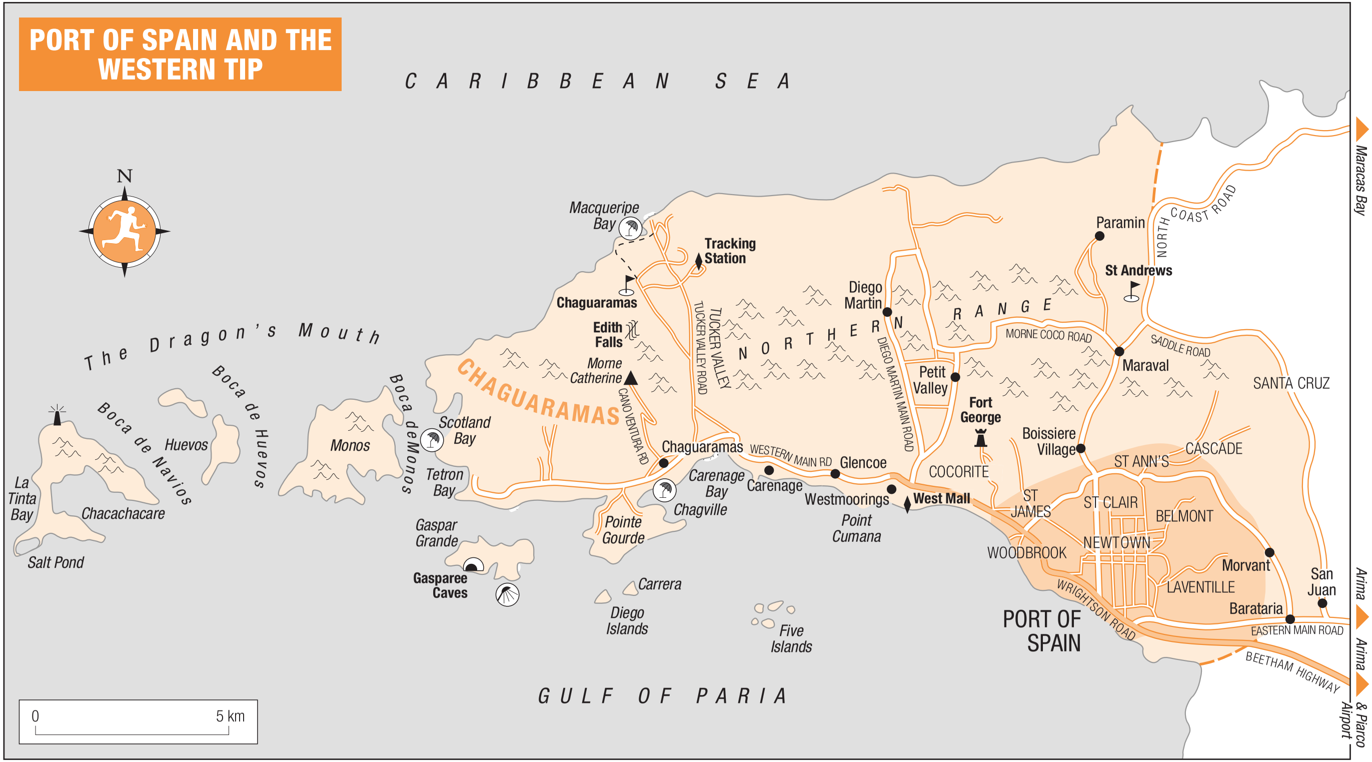
1

Port of Spain and the western tip

Trinidad's **western tip** – a peninsula extending towards Venezuela from the northern part of the island and dividing the Gulf of Paria and the Caribbean Sea – comprises the island's most urbanized area. The country's capital and its commercial and cultural centre, **Port of Spain** sits between the forested mountains of the Northern Range and the waters of the gulf. Home to nearly a third of Trinidad's population, as well as many immigrants from other islands and Venezuela, this is a city that buzzes with metropolitan verve, a thriving place that serves as the hub of the southern Caribbean. Although exciting in any season, with a brilliant nightlife scene, the best time to be here is during the weeks leading up to **Carnival**, when there are nightly fetes and panyards to take in as well as the biggest Jouvert celebrations in Trinidad and, of course, the kaleidoscope of the Parade of the Bands.

Beyond the city's western suburbs, the landscape becomes increasingly less developed. The **Chaguaramas** area, much of it protected as a national park, is crisscrossed by a network of forest trails, while the coast is lined with marinas and boatyards interspersed with a few good bars and restaurants, as well as Macqueripe, a sheltered cove that offers excellent swimming. The further west you go, the more wild and undeveloped the terrain becomes. Beyond Chaguaramas, the western tip crumbles into a series of rocky islands separated by rough, swirling channels known as the **Bocas del Dragon** – the Dragon's Mouth. Though the islands – the most accessible and developed of which is **Gaspar Grande**, the most isolated and atmospheric, **Chacachacare** – lie just a short distance offshore, they are completely free of motorized traffic. In the eighteenth century, they were a refuge for whalers, smugglers and pirates; today, they're the preserve of yachting enthusiasts, fishermen and anyone in search of tranquillity.

Port of Spain and its suburbs have a wide range of **accommodation** to suit all budgets. Whether you're visiting the city for Carnival or plan to explore other parts of Trinidad, you will almost certainly end up staying here at some point. Indeed, it's entirely feasible to base yourself in Port of Spain and visit the rest of Trinidad on day-trips, either by renting a car or using the public transport network that radiates out from the City Gate bus and maxi terminus.


PORT OF SPAIN AND THE WESTERN TIP
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The Dragon's Mouth
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5 km
Maracas Bay
Arima
Arima
& Piarco Airport
NORTH COAST ROAD
Paramin
St Andrews
SADDLE ROAD
MORNE COCO ROAD
Maraval
SANTA CRUZ
San Juan
Barataria
EASTERN MAIN ROAD
BEETHAM HIGHWAY
Morvant
LAVENTILLE
BELMONT
CASCADE
ST ANN'S
ST CLAIR
NEWTOWN
ST JAMES
WOODBROOK
WRIGHTSON ROAD
PORT OF SPAIN
Boissiere Village
Fort George
COCORITE
Petit Valley
DIEGO MARTIN MAIN ROAD
Diego Martin
NORTHERN RANGE
West Mall
Westmoorings
Point Cumana
Glencoe
WESTERN MAIN RD
Carenage
Carenage Bay
Chagville
Chaguaramas
TUCKER VALLEY
TUCKER VALLEY ROAD
Tracking Station
Macqueripe Bay
Chaguaramas
Edith Falls
Morne Catherine
CANO VENTURA RD
CHAGUARAMAS
Pointe Gourde
Scotland Bay
Tetron Bay
Boca deMonos
Gaspar Grande
Gasparee Caves
Carrera
Diego Islands
Five Islands
Monos
Boca de Huevos
Huevos
Boca de Navios
Chacachacare
La Tinta Bay
Salt Pond

Port of Spain

PORT OF SPAIN occupies a crucial place in T&T's national psyche. It's the hub of the republic's booming economy, the home of government and the media, and the crucible of Trinidad's rich **cultural life**, with legions of mas camps and panyards as well as art galleries and theatres; it was here that Carnival was first established in Trinidad, and – in the suburb of Laventille – that the steel pan was invented.

Spreading back from the Gulf of Paria and enclosed by the crumpled green folds of the Northern Range, Port of Spain has a dynamic, sophisticated feel that's markedly different from the rest of the country. Some 128,000 inhabitants jostle for space in and around its compact centre; the latest soca tunes blare from shops, cars and pavement stalls, while locals lime outside the bars and flashy SUVs compete with the taxis and maxis for their share of roadspace. It's a rather schizophrenic mix of the old and the new, with street traders selling cinnamon sticks or mauby bark as well as sleek new shopping malls bursting with international chains, and glinting high-rises overlooking colonial-era squares.

The mishmash of architectural styles makes for an ugly first impression, especially **downtown**, with its traffic-choked streets, grimy docks and frenzied commercial activity. On exploring the city, however, you'll come across many fine nineteenth-century buildings among the high-rises and garish new developments: dignified churches and state offices, the grandiose mansions of colonial planters, and quaint "gingerbread" houses, named after their intricate fretted woodwork. Many of these older buildings are located **uptown**, a gracious district arranged around the large open space of the **Queen's Park Savannah**, which was created by enlightened town planners in the early nineteenth century, and now provides some much-needed breathing room.

The districts of **Woodbrook**, **Belmont**, **St Ann's**, **St James** and **Laventille**, previously old plantation estates, stretch along the flat coastal plains to the west and creep up the hills of the Northern Range. Hardly the suburban stereotype of drowsy bedroom communities, they're very much part of the city: Hindu temples rub shoulders with panyards, while carnival costumes are created in the many **mas camps** during the months preceding Carnival – the most exciting time to be in Port of Spain. During **Carnival** itself – the Monday and Tuesday before Ash Wednesday – the city's volatile mix of style, hedonism, creativity and *joie de vivre* explodes onto the streets, as bands of fantastically arrayed revellers wind their way through the city.

North of the Savannah and spreading back from the Saddle Road en route to Maracas Bay, the capital's nearest beach (see p.121), well-to-do, leafy **Maraval** boasts a few great places to eat and party, as well as a clutch of small-scale hotels. It's also the place to hop on one of the jeep taxis that pick their way along the switchback turns and near-vertical inclines that characterize the small, friendly farming community of **Paramin**, which offers heady city views and some welcome respite from the heat and bustle.

Some history

Port of Spain became Trinidad's capital almost by accident. In 1757, a series of pirate attacks on the then capital St Joseph left the residence of the new **Spanish governor**, Don Pedro de la Moneda, uninhabitable, prompting him to move the seat of government to the more convenient location of Puerto de España (a port of

Spain). Though the town consisted of no more than two streets with a few hundred residents and was built on swampy, flood-prone ground, it did have the great advantage of a fine natural **harbour**, and was quickly made the permanent capital.

As French Catholics flooded into Trinidad in the 1780s, Port of Spain's economy boomed and the city spread. Land was reclaimed from the sea, and streets were built over the surrounding mangrove swamps and woods. The last Spanish governor, Don Maria José Chacon, greatly facilitated this expansion when, in 1787, he diverted the St Ann's River to the outskirts of the town, along the foot of Laventille hill, alleviating the floods that had often troubled the city. Chacon was less effective, however, when it came to defending the city against the **British**, who in 1797 invaded and took over the island. In 1808, a devastating fire led the British governor, Sir Ralph Woodford, to make a number of civic improvements, establishing the Queen's Park Savannah and developing Woodford Square. Learning from Spanish mistakes, the British also improved the city's defences by building Fort George and Fort Picton.

After **emancipation** in 1834, freed slaves left plantations to find work in the capital, settling in the hills to the east of the city, where they established the suburbs of Laventille and Belmont. With a growing population of workers, traders and entrepreneurs, the city sprawled outwards into the old plantations of Maraval and St Ann's. Indian immigrants, brought to Trinidad under indentured labour schemes, settled in St James, while the population was further swelled by migrants from China, Portugal, Venezuela and Syria. The descendants of these groups, and those of the French and Spanish communities, compose the cosmopolitan mix of peoples and cultures that make Port of Spain unique today.

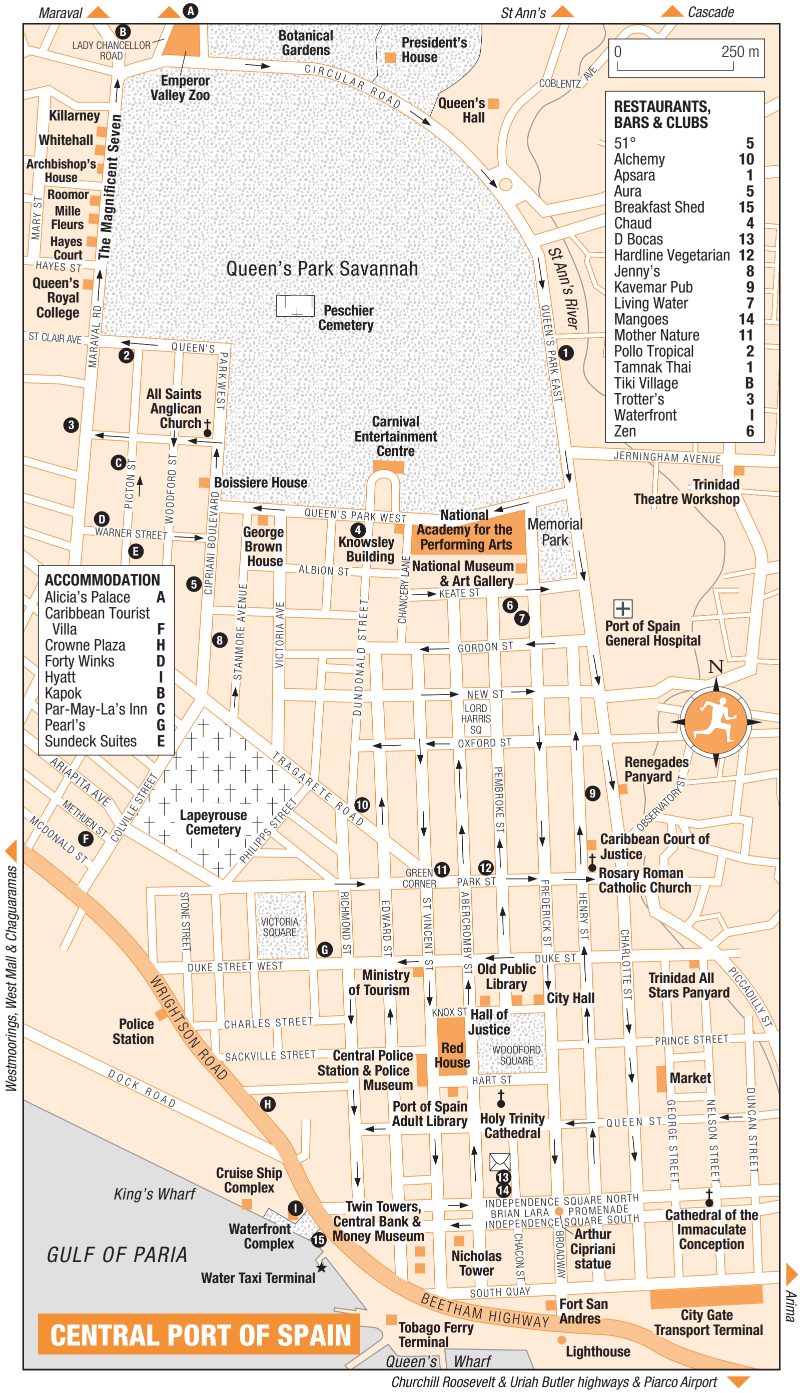
As the nation's capital, Port of Spain was naturally the focus for both the **political turmoil** and the **growing prosperity** that marked the country's history during the twentieth century. From the water riots of 1903, through the independence movement of the 1950s down to the bloody 1990 coup attempt, Woodford Square has been an arena of political strife. The dredging of the city's **deepwater harbour** in the 1930s made Port of Spain the leading port of the southern Caribbean, while the discovery of offshore oil in the 1970s left the city with a sleek **financial district**, dominated by the imposing twin towers of the Central Bank; today, the Port of Spain skyline bristles with several new high-rise blocks, from sleek Nicholas Tower to the rash of new government high-rises on Wrightson Road. In fact, the buoyant consumerism of the last twenty years or so has seen lavish developments springing up all over the city, from American-style luxury malls and exclusive gated communities to the futuristic Academy for the Performing Arts on the Savannah and the slick new waterside promenade around the *Hyatt* hotel.

Arrival

Port of Spain is about 20km northwest of **Piarco International Airport**, where a small **tourist information office** (daily 8am–midnight; ☎669 5196) can provide you with maps and information on the capital and the island in general. Just after you clear immigration there is a **bureau de change** (daily 24hr), while the main concourse in between the arrivals and departure areas has several **ATMs**.

Official **airport taxis**, which wait outside the main entrance, will take you into the town centre for around US$30 (30min, 1–2hr during rush hour, 6–8am & 4–6pm). Prices to all destinations, quoted in US$, are listed in the arrivals hall

CENTRAL PORT OF SPAIN


Maraval
A
St Ann's
Cascade
B
LADY CHANCELLOR ROAD
Botanical Gardens
President's House
CIRCULAR ROAD
Emperor Valley Zoo
Queen's Hall
COBLENTZ AVE
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Killarney
Whitehall
Archbishop's House
Roomor
Mille Fleurs
Hayes Court
The Magnificent Seven
MARY ST
HAYES ST
Queen's Royal College
ST CLAIR AVE
MARAVAL RD
Queen's Park Savannah
Peschier Cemetery
St Ann's River
QUEEN'S PARK EAST
QUEEN'S PARK WEST
All Saints Anglican Church
Carnival Entertainment Centre
PICTON ST
WOODFORD ST
Boissiere House
JERNINGHAM AVENUE
Trinidad Theatre Workshop
WARNER STREET
CIPRIANI BOULEVARD
George Brown House
Knowsley Building
National Academy for the Performing Arts
Memorial Park
National Museum & Art Gallery
ALBION ST
CHANCERY LANE
KEATE ST
STANMORE AVENUE
VICTORIA AVE
DUNDONALD STREET
GORDON ST
Port of Spain General Hospital
N
NEW ST
LORD HARRIS SQ
OXFORD ST
PEMBROKE ST
Renegades Panyard
OBSERVATORY ST
ARIAPITA AVE
METHUEN ST
COLVILLE STREET
TRAGARETE ROAD
MCDONALD ST
Lapeyrouse Cemetery
PHILIPPS STREET
Caribbean Court of Justice
Rosary Roman Catholic Church
GREEN CORNER
PARK ST
STONE STREET
VICTORIA SQUARE
RICHMOND ST
EDWARD ST
ST VINCENT ST
ABERCROMBY ST
FREDERICK ST
HENRY ST
CHARLOTTE ST
DUKE STREET WEST
DUKE ST
Ministry of Tourism
Old Public Library
City Hall
Trinidad All Stars Panyard
PICCADILLY ST
KNOX ST
Hall of Justice
CHARLES STREET
Police Station
WRIGHTSON ROAD
SACKVILLE STREET
Central Police Station & Police Museum
Red House
WOODFORD SQUARE
PRINCE STREET
Market
DOCK ROAD
HART ST
Port of Spain Adult Library
Holy Trinity Cathedral
QUEEN ST
GEORGE STREET
NELSON STREET
DUNCAN STREET
Westmoorings, West Mall & Chaguaramas
H
Cruise Ship Complex
King's Wharf
Twin Towers, Central Bank & Money Museum
INDEPENDENCE SQUARE NORTH
BRIAN LARA PROMENADE
INDEPENDENCE SQUARE SOUTH
Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception
Waterfront Complex
GULF OF PARIA
Water Taxi Terminal
Nicholas Tower
CHACON ST
BROADWAY
Arthur Cipriani statue
SOUTH QUAY
BEETHAM HIGHWAY
Fort San Andres
City Gate Transport Terminal
Arima
Tobago Ferry Terminal
Lighthouse
Queen's Wharf
Churchill Roosevelt & Uriah Butler highways & Piarco Airport
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15
C D E F G I

RESTAURANTS, BARS & CLUBS

51°	5
Alchemy	10
Apsara	1
Aura	5
Breakfast Shed	15
Chaud	4
D Bocas	13
Hardline Vegetarian	12
Jenny's	8
Kavemar Pub	9
Living Water	7
Mangoes	14
Mother Nature	11
Pollo Tropical	2
Tamnak Thai	1
Tiki Village	B
Trotter's	3
Waterfront	I
Zen	6

ACCOMMODATION

Alicia's Palace	A
Caribbean Tourist Villa	F
Crowne Plaza	H
Forty Winks	D
Hyatt	I
Kapok	B
Par-May-La's Inn	C
Pearl's	G
Sundeck Suites	E

where the **car rental** agencies are situated. Taxi drivers will also accept local currency. Note that between 10pm and 6am fares to and from the airport increase by fifty percent. If you fancy a gentler introduction to Port of Spain than a taxi ride, with lots of local info thrown in to prime your trip, try Island Experiences (ⓣ625 2410 or 781 6235), whose drivers charge around US$5 more than regular taxis.

Alternatively, take a shared **route taxi** to Arouca Junction on the Eastern Main Road. From there, you can catch an eastbound **red-band maxi taxi** to downtown Port of Spain's City Gate (see p.71). However route taxis don't come into the airport concourse – you'll have to walk for ten minutes or so to the main road, where taxis pass at regular intervals.

A PTSC **bus** (see opposite) runs into town five times a day (Mon–Fri 7.15am, 7.45am, 4.10pm, 5pm & 6pm) from the main airport entrance, ten minutes, walk from arrivals. Departure times from City Gate are 6.30am, 7am, 3.15pm, 3.45pm and 5pm.

Orientation and information

Port of Spain's compact **downtown area** is based on a grid system, and is easy to explore on foot, with everything in walking distance of Independence Square/Brian Lara Promenade, one block north of City Gate, the main transport terminal. The **uptown** area is ranged around the large green expanse of the Queen's Park Savannah, which becomes a focal point during Carnival. There are four main roads leading out of the central downtown area. **Wrightson Road** from downtown joins the Audrey Jeffers Highway, which heads west past the suburbs of Diego Martin and Westmoorings and out towards Chaguaramas. **Tragarete Road** and parallel **Ariapita Avenue** run from uptown Park Street through Woodbrook before joining, respectively, the **Western Main Road** into St James and the highway at the MovieTowne complex. **Saddle Road** leads from the northwest corner of the Queen's Park Savannah to Maraval and eventually Maracas Beach. From the northeast corner of the Savannah, **St Ann's Road** takes you to St Ann's and Cascade.

Trinidad's **tourist board**, the TDC (ⓣ675 7034, ⓦwww.gotrinidadandtobago.com), doesn't have an office in the city. You can pick up brochures and useful free magazines at the Ministry of Tourism office on the corner of Duke and St Vincent streets in downtown Port of Spain (Mon–Fri 8am–4.30pm; ⓣ624 1403, ⓦwww.tourism.gov.tt).

City transport

During the day, Port of Spain and its environs are served by plenty of **buses**, **maxis** and **route taxis**, though traffic jams are terrible and it might be faster to walk during the rush hours (roughly 7–9am & 4–6pm). Route taxis – and to a lesser extent maxis – also operate throughout the night on the more popular routes (including Maraval), albeit a lot less frequently than during the day. As they're subject to change and are always very small amounts, we haven't quoted exact fares for public transport. Most route- or maxi-taxi drivers are unlikely to try and rip you off, but the best plan is to ask around, watch what other passengers pay, or just offer up a 5 or 10 dollar bill and hold out your hand for change (looking, of course, as though you know exactly what you should be getting back).

Buses

PTSC (Public Transport Service Corporation Ⓣ623 2262, Ⓦwww.ptsc.co.tt) **buses** provide a fast air-conditioned means of travelling around the city, though you of course have to wait for one to turn up, and services are not as frequent as you might hope. All buses start from **City Gate**, and fares are TT$2–4. The website carries detailed route maps and schedules, and lists fares. Routes start at around 6am, and end at 9/10pm.

Useful bus routes

To central Port of Spain (City Gate special): City Gate, Abercromby St, New St, Frederick St, Queen's Park Savannah, Belmont.

To Chaguaramas same as Diego Martin route, but once on Audrey Jeffers Hwy the bus continues on through St James along the Western Main Rd, passing West Mall, West Moorings, Glencoe, Carenage and Chaguaramas, ending at the *Cove* hotel (5am–10pm).

To Diego Martin Wrightson Rd, Ariapita Ave, Mucurapo Rd, Audrey Jeffers Hwy, Diego Martin.

Maxi taxis

Maxi taxis operating in Port of Spain and the western tip have yellow bands along the side of the vehicle. Routes are set although some drivers may be willing to make off-route drops, and if the maxi is empty, the driver may vary the route in the hope of picking up some passengers.

There are three main places to catch Port of Spain maxis. For **Carenage** and **Chaguaramas** via Wrightson Road, the rank is at the junction of South Quay and St Vincent Street. Maxis bound for **Maraval via St James** start at the corner of Charlotte and Park streets, opposite the petrol station, while those for **Carenage and Chaguaramas** via Ariapita Avenue in Woodbrook start at Green Corner (the corner of St Vincent and Park sts). For further information call the maxi rank on South Quay (Ⓣ625 4053). **Fares** around town should always be under TT$10. Note that many maxi drivers now won't accept passengers not travelling the full (or most of) the route in what's called a "short drop"; if you need to go only part-way, take a route taxi.

Route taxis

As in maxis, all off-route drops in **route taxis** depend on the driver's goodwill. Signposted starting points for city routes are dotted around downtown Port of Spain, and fares average around TT$3.50. Note that route taxis are the best option for heading downtown; the one-way system can be confusing and parking is a nightmare.

Routes and taxi stands

To Belmont Charlotte St, at Queen.

To Diego Martin South Quay, at Broadway. Route ends at Diego Martin waterwheel via Four Roads and Diego Martin Main Rd. After 6pm Diego Martin taxis can be found near the Arthur Cipriani statue on Brian Lara Promenade.

To Laventille Nelson St, at Prince.

To Maraval/Paramin Duke St, at Charlotte. Route ends at Maraval village/beginning of Paramin.

To Petit Valley South Quay, at Broadway. Route ends at Mount Coco Rd at the Capaldeo Flats. After 6pm check near the Arthur Cipriani statue on Brian Lara Promenade.

To St Ann's Hart St, on the side adjacent to the Holy Trinity Anglican Cathedral. Route ends at Bishop Anstey School.

To St James/Tragarete Rd Hart St, on the side adjacent to Woodford Square. From around 7pm to 5am St James/Tragarete Rd taxis can be found on Independence Square, at Henry St.

To Wrightson Rd/Long Circular Rd Chacon St, at South Quay. After 6pm Wrightson Rd/Long Circular Rd route starts from near the Arthur Cipriani statue on Brian Lara Promenade.

Carnival accommodation

The run-up to **Carnival** is easily the busiest time of year in Port of Spain, and if you intend to stay anywhere in the city during this time it's essential to book well in advance. Regular Carnival-goers reserve their accommodation for the following year on Ash Wednesday, and it's a good idea to book very early if you have your heart set on a particular place – or area, with downtown, Woodbrook and Newtown/St Clair being the most convenient for the parade route. As well as trying the places listed below, it's also a good idea to check the classified sections of newspapers (which are also available online; see p.34), where rooms in private houses are advertised, sometimes at very reasonable rates, alongside last-minute vacancies in hotels and guesthouses.

Carnival prices, which can be more than double normal rates, usually apply from the Wednesday or Friday preceding Carnival through to Ash Wednesday. The majority of hotels and guesthouses insist on five- to eight-night **minimum stays** which you'll have to pay for even if you don't stay there the whole period. Note that the codes listed in this book relate to non-Carnival rates.

Private taxis and tours

Private taxis tend to be cleaner and better maintained than route taxis, with functioning air conditioning, but are as expensive as cabs in New York or London. They're not hailed on the street, but ordered by phone or by going to their ranks, usually outside smart hotels such as the *Hilton* and *Kapok* or on Independence Square. Reputable firms include **Phone-a-Taxi** (Ⓣ628-TAXI), a Maraval-based company with rates around half those of the competition. You can also try **Ice House Taxi Service**, Independence Square North (Ⓣ627 6984), or **Independence Square Taxi Service**, Independence Square, at Frederick Street (Ⓣ625 3032).

If you want to see Port of Spain from an insiders' perspective, it's well worth joining one of the excellent city tours offered by **Island Experiences** (Ⓣ625 2410, Ⓦwww.islandexperiencestt.com), from sightseeing to evening excursions taking in panyards and clubs.

Accommodation

Accommodation in Port of Spain is plentiful and varied, from inexpensive guest-houses to business-oriented chain hotels, with some nice boutique-type places in between. Staying **downtown** is convenient for shops, services and sightseeing, but it's quiet after dark here and there isn't much choice. **Woodbrook** is a better option, with the lion's share of the **guesthouses**, good public transport links and plenty of restaurants and bars – and if you stay at the eastern end of the suburb, the downtown area is only ten minutes' walk away.

A short walk from the Savannah, **Newtown** and **St Clair** are less vibrant (though quieter), with a sprinkling of reasonably priced options. Spreading up into the hills surrounding the Savannah, **St Ann's** and **Cascade** are greener, breezier and less urbanized, but public transport is less frequent and there are no stand-alone bars or restaurants. Also outside the city centre to the north, **Maraval** has a couple of decent hotels on the main Saddle Road, connected to town via route taxis.

Downtown and the waterfront

The places listed here appear on the Central Port of Spain map, p.63.

Crowne Plaza 1017 Wrightson Rd ⓣ625 3366, ⓦwww.ichotelsgroup.com. Glitzy, rather faceless corporate hotel with a convenient downtown location and all mod cons: pool, three restaurants, bar, gym, business centre. All rooms have excellent views over the port and Gulf of Paria or the city, and come equipped with a/c, hairdryer, iron and board, coffeemaker, satellite TV and phone. Breakfast is included. ⑤

Hyatt 1 Wrightson Rd ⓣ623 2222, ⓦwww.trinidad.hyatt.com. This glinting tower on the waterfront is Trinidad's most upmarket business hotel; facilities run from a gorgeous infinity pool overlooking the Gulf of Paria on the rooftop to a state-of-the art spa, gym, an excellent waterside restaurant and a sushi bar (see p.93). The rooms are anonymously chic, with bamboo floors, flat-screen TVs and handsome city views, and there's a huge private car park. ⑥–⑨

Pearl's 3–4 Victoria Square East ⓣ625 2158, ⓔpeterhenry@yahoo.com. A rambling old colonial house with a verandah overlooking picturesque Victoria Square, this is the cheapest place in Port of Spain, and rates increase only slightly for Carnival. The rooms are nothing to write home about, with fans, sinks and basic furniture; bathrooms are shared and there's a communal kitchen and TV room, but it's a great first stop-off with plenty of travellers passing through. Friendly, helpful hosts, and perfectly situated for Carnival and downtown sightseeing. ②

Woodbrook and St James

Unless otherwise stated, the places listed here appear on the Western Suburbs map, p.80.

Allamanda 61 Carlos St, Woodbrook ⓣ622 1480 or 7719, ⓔtheallamanda@yahoo.com. Airy, professionally run place bedecked with plants and artwork. The spotlessly clean en-suite rooms have a/c, cable TV, ceiling fan, tea- and coffee-making equipment and fridge, and there are also a couple of studios with the same facilities plus kitchenette. All guests are lent a mobile phone, and breakfast is included, as is use of a kitchen. ④

Ambassador 99A Long Circular Rd, St James ⓣ628 9000, ⓦwww.ambassadortt.com. Fairly plush if rather sterile 1970s-style hotel opposite the US ambassador's residence (you could imagine an elderly aunt feeling most at home), with a restaurant, cocktail lounge, swimming pool, nightclub and business centre. Large en-suite rooms with a/c, cable TV and high-speed web access; some have excellent views over Port of Spain. ⑤

Caribbean Tourist Villa 7 Methuen St (see Central Port of Spain map, p.63) ⓣ627 5423, ⓔcaribbeantouristvilla@gmail.com. Tidy but rather dated rooms, well positioned on the downtown fringes of Woodbrook; all are en suite and have phone, a/c, cable TV and fridge; there's also a nice little pool, communal lounge, a computer for guests' use and laundry facilities. Free wi-fi, too. ③

Courtyard by Marriott Invader's Bay, Audrey Jeffers Hwy ⓣ627 5555, ⓦwww.marriott.com. Within walking distance of MovieTowne and a favoured choice of businesspeople, so rates are reduced on weekends. Rooms have all the amenities you'd expect of an international chain, including free wi-fi, and there's a pool, restaurant and bar. Neat, tidy and friendly if a little soulless. ⑥

Fabienne's 15 Belle Smythe St, Woodbrook ⓣ622 2773, ⓔfabiennes1961@hotmail.com. Set around a tree-shaded courtyard, the comfortable if basic en-suite rooms here have fridge and standing fans or a/c, but are a little overpriced in comparison to other places in the area. There's a communal lounge with shared fridge, laundry facilities, and breakfast is available. ③

Gingerbread House 8 Carlos St, Woodbrook ⓣ627 8170, mobile 792 4334, ⓦwww.trinidadgingerbreadhouse.com. Beautifully maintained gingerbread house with a wraparound verandah and quirky, chic modern touches courtesy of the architect owner. There are three lovely rooms in the main house, and another in a separate building out back with its own patio; all are en suite with a/c, fridge and cable TV, and there's a rather unique plunge pool out back. Full breakfast included. ④

Johnson's 16 Buller St, Woodbrook ⓣ628 7553, ⓔjohnsonsbandb@hotmail.com. Friendly, helpful hosts and spotless, well-maintained rooms with fans and cable TV; a/c rooms with fridge cost a bit more, and the cheaper ones share bathrooms. Guests have use of a kitchen and lounge. Good value, and just ten minutes' from the town centre; full breakfast is included in all rates. ③

La Calypso 46 French St, Woodbrook ⓣ622 4077, ⓔlacalypso@tstt.net.tt. Functional but lacking atmosphere and natural light, with spartan decor and so-so service, but location and low rates make it a good budget option. Facilities vary – the nicer rooms have a/c, cable TV, kitchenette and bathroom, while others are just a simple room with shared bathroom. There's also a sundeck and a shared kitchen area. ②–③

Melbourne Inn 7 French St, Woodbrook ⓣ623 4006, ⓔmelbourneinn@hotmail.com. A slightly dilapidated air, but a great location for Carnival if a little expensive for the standard of rooms. All are decent sized, with cable TV, ceiling and standing fans or a/c, and private or shared bathrooms. There's a sundeck and a large communal veranda, and breakfast is available. ②–③

Nemoy 22 Gallus St, Woodbrook ⓣ623 4133, mobile 787 7584, ⓦwww.nemoyguesthouse.com. Friendly, sparkling-clean and efficient guesthouse in the heart of Woodbrook with an ebullient owner who's a mine of information on all things T&T. The en-suite rooms have a/c and ceiling fan, some have cable TV. A huge breakfast is included in the rates, and there's a pretty barbecue spot out back. ③

The Savannah, St Ann's and Cascade

Unless otherwise stated, the places listed here appear on the Eastern Suburbs map, p.87.

Alicia's House 7 Coblentz Gardens, St Ann's ⓣ623 2802, ⓦwww.aliciashouse.com. Located on a quiet road close to the Savannah, all the rooms at this busy little hotel have wicker furniture, a/c, fridge, phone and cable TV; most are en suite, but a few share bathrooms, and there's a swimming pool, sundeck and jacuzzi. Meals are available, as is wi-fi, and breakfast is included. ④–⑤

Alicia's Palace 1 ¾ Mile Post, Lady Chancellor Rd (see Central Port of Spain map, p.63) ⓣ624 8553, ⓦwww.aliciaspalace.com. Gorgeous location on this very scenic road, with cool breezes and a bird's-eye view of Port of Spain and down the coast to Caroni – rooms 98 or 105 have the best vistas. All rooms are en suite, with a/c, cable TV, fridge and phone, there's a pool and the veranda restaurant is beautifully situated overlooking the valley. Shuttle service down into town, wi-fi and breakfast included in the rates. ④–⑤

Carlton Savannah Coblentz Ave, St Ann's ⓣ621 5000, ⓦwww.thecarltonsavannah.com. The most upmarket place in the capital (even Britain's Queen Elizabeth stayed in 2009), this is an oasis of very un-Trinidadian designer style, with luxury stamped over everything from the gorgeous mosaic-tiled coffee tables in the lobby to the Molton Brown soap in the washrooms. Rooms have 300-thread-count Egyptian cotton sheets and every possible amenity, and there are two restaurants, three bars and a gym and lovely pool on site. ⑤–⑨

Chancellor 5 St Ann's Ave, St Ann's ⓣ623 0883, ⓦwww.thechancellorhotel.com. Tucked down a side road near the *Normandie*. Spacious en-suite rooms and suites arranged around a courtyard, with bright decor, a/c and cable TV, plus a lovely pool with a waterfall, a bar and an a/c restaurant, and wireless internet throughout. Rather overpriced; rates include breakfast. ⑦

Coblentz Inn 44 Coblentz Ave, Cascade ⓣ621 0541, ⓦwww.coblentzinn.com. Boutique-style hotel, full of quirky, stylish furnishings and thoughtful little touches that convey a sense of understated luxury. There are eclectically designed themed rooms – from "Rum Shop" to "The Savannah" – as well as appealing standards; all are en suite and come with a/c, cable TV, VCR, CD player, hairdryer and kitchenette. Wi-fi throughout, plus a shady rooftop terrace and a pool. Continental breakfast included. ⑤

Earl's Court 5 First Ave, Cascade ⓣ627 3106. Appealing guesthouse on a quiet residential street in walking distance of the Savannah, with a variety of clean, pleasant rooms with tiled floor, cable TV and fan or a/c; those upstairs have more natural light. There's a communal kitchen and TV area, breezy porch and free wi-fi, and the rates are excellent. ②–③

Halyconia Inn 7 First Ave, Cascade ⓣ623 0008, ⓦwww.halyconiainn.com. Sprawling colonial-era home converted into a basic, functional dormitory-style hotel much favoured by visiting sports teams; most rooms have bunk beds and sleep four (good value if travelling in a group), and there are agreeable doubles with a/c, cable TV, phone, fridge and private bathroom. There's a large pool, kitchen facilities and a canteen dining room. Bunks US$20; doubles ③

Hilton Trinidad Lady Young Rd, St Ann's ⓣ624 3211, ⓦwww.hiltoncaribbean.com. "Upside down" hotel built down the side of a hill, with the reception at the top and the floors numbered downwards from 1 to 11. Each room has a balcony with excellent views over Port of Spain and the hotel's landscaped garden, plus all the usual *Hilton* luxuries. Facilities include tennis courts, a sauna and fitness centre, and a large pool that serves as a popular venue for pre-Carnival fetes. ⑤–⑥

L'Orchidee 3 Coblentz Gdns, St Ann's ⓣ621 0618, ⓦwww.trinidadhosthomes.com. Tucked away on a side street off the Savannah, this is a newish little hotel fitted out to a very high standard, with twelve bright, modern rooms with all mod cons themed around different orchids, plus a pretty outside terrace and excellent service from the very professional staff. Popular with business travellers, with free wi-fi and a full breakfast included. ⑥

Normandie 10 Nook Ave, St Ann's ☎624 1181, Ⓦwww.normandiett.com. On a quiet cul-de-sac just five-minute walk from the Queen's Park Savannah, this is one of the city's more atmospheric large hotels, with a lively feel provided by the annual Carnival concerts, and by the on-site boutiques, café and popular restaurant (see p.96). Most rooms have wooden floorboards (the refurbished ones are tiled), a/c, cable TV, phone, iron and board, hairdryer and en-suite bathroom, and there's a lovely pool and wi-fi throughout. Continental breakfast included. ⑥

Newton and St Clair

The places listed here appear on the Central Port of Spain map, p.63.

Forty Winks 24 Warner St, Newton ☎622 0484, Ⓦwww.fortywinkstt.com. Guesthouse aimed at the business traveller who doesn't want to stay at a typical business hotel. The en-suite rooms are on the smallish side, but all come with a/c, cable TV and phone. The house is brightly decorated and has an outdoor patio, a rooftop terrace and a kitchen for guests' use; there's wireless internet access throughout. Wi-fi and full breakfast are included in the rates. ④

Kapok 16–18 Cotton Hill, St Clair ☎622 5765, Ⓦwww.kapokhotel.com. Elegant, stylish hotel decorated with rattan furniture and handsome artwork, and in a great position for Carnival. All rooms are spacious with a/c, satellite TV, radio, clock, phone, iron and en-suite bathroom; studios and suites with kitchen facilities are also available, and there's free wi-fi. Good restaurant (see p.95), wine and coffee bar, swimming pool, gym and sundeck on site, and breakfast is included. ⑦

Par-May-La's Inn 53 Picton St, Newtown ☎628 2008, Ⓦwww.parmaylas.com. On a quiet street (though very convenient for downtown), this reliable Port of Spain stalwart boasts helpful hosts and a nice communal veranda where continental breakfast – included in the rates – is served. Very spacious a/c rooms with phone, TV and en-suite bathroom; wi-fi available at an additional cost. ③

Sundeck Suites 42–44 Picton St, Newtown, ☎622 9560, Ⓦwww.sundecktrinidad.com. The self-catering version of sister establishment *Par-May-La's*, and aimed at longer-stay visitors who want a degree of independence, *Sundeck* has bright, modern apartments with kitchenette, ceiling fans, a/c, en-suite bathroom and cable TV; some also have a small balcony. There's a sundeck on the roof, and facilities for the disabled. ③

Maraval

Chaconia Hotel 106 Saddle Rd ☎628 0941, Ⓦwww.chaconiahotel.com. Modern, efficient hotel with a Mediterranean design. The comfortable rooms are a little on the small side; all are en suite, with a/c, cable TV, hairdryer, safe and high-speed internet. There's a tiny swimming pool, a decent restaurant and a bar-lounge. Rates include a buffet breakfast. ⑤

Monique's 114–116 Saddle Rd ☎628 3334, Ⓦwww.moniquestrinidad.com. Long-established and friendly, with a variety of plush rooms featuring a/c, fridge, phone and cable TV – some have kitchenette and balcony, and one is equipped for people with disabilities. Splendid views from the rooms in the building on the hill, about 200m up the road from the main part of the guesthouse, and the genial, genuinely helpful staff are a real plus. Wi-fi, and decent restaurant and bar. ④

Downtown Port of Spain

Dating back to the 1780s, **downtown** Port of Spain is the city's oldest district, and in places it still looks the part, though the colonial-era buildings on the backstreets are fast giving way to a rash of new development. Constantly reinventing itself in a frenzy of modernization, this is the capital's shopping and financial centre. Within the compact grid of streets surrounding broad **Independence Square/Brian Lara Promenade** and bustling **Frederick Street**, shops jostle for space with old Spanish warehouses, coffee exporters' offices, finance houses and the paraphernalia of the **docks**, while the thoroughfares are jammed with traffic, pedestrians and pavement vendors.

Independence Square/Brian Lara Promenade

Downtown Port of Spain's best-known thoroughfare, **Independence Square/Brian Lara Promenade** consists of two parallel streets, divided by a shady paved area (the promenade) dotted with benches and concrete chess tables; it's a popular after-work liming spot, with street-food vendors doing a brisk trade. The throngs of people here inevitably attract a fair number of beggars (particularly around the cathedral), who patrol the promenade and tend to latch onto foreigners – keep your wits about you. The cumbersome title is a result of frequent **name changes** in recent decades. Until independence in 1962, it was Marine Square, in honour of the fact that this land was reclaimed from the sea in 1816. It was rechristened Independence Square in 1962, and its central section was later renamed to honour Trinidad's most famous cricketer.

The western end of the square is dominated by the sleek blue-and-silver **Nicholas Tower**, and the dated-looking twin towers of the **Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago**. Opened in 1985, the latter form the heart of Port of Spain's financial district and house the Central Bank, the Prime Minister's offices and the Central Bank Auditorium, inside which you'll find the **Money Museum** (tours Tues–Fri 9.30am & 2.30pm; free), a slick trawl through the history of cash, from cowrie shells to plastic money, as well as the slave trade (look out for the paraphernalia from the Slave Savings Bank), oil and petrodollars. It's a neat and concise summary of the nation's fiscal development, if not particularly thrilling. The slew of new high-rises overlooking the other side of the Promenade, make up the spanking new **Government Campus Plaza**, built to accommodate various government ministries from Legal Affairs to Customs and Excise.

Halfway down the promenade, at the junction with Frederick Street, the **Arthur Cipriani statue** commemorates a former Port of Spain mayor who campaigned energetically for compulsory education for all and self-government for the island – the only legislator of his day to defend workers' rights. He died in 1945 and is buried in the Lapeyrouse Cemetery in Woodbrook (see p.82).

Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception and Columbus Square

At its eastern end, Independence Square intersects with Nelson Street, which runs through one of Port of Spain's rougher areas and isn't a great place to wander, tempting as the crumbling colonial-era buildings may look. Opposite the junction, the Promenade is taken up with the imposing Roman Catholic **Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception**, a legacy of Governor Woodford's post-fire reconstruction. Completed in 1836, the twin-towered Gothic construction took sixteen years to build; its ironwork frame was shipped from England, while the blue metal stone came from the Laventille quarries. Restoration during the 1980s added sixteen **stained-glass windows** depicting T&T's many ethnic groups, the highlight of an otherwise rather drab interior.

The promenade ends just east of the cathedral at diminutive **Columbus Square**, named after the colourful statue of the Spanish "discoverer" and today a very run-down spot that serves as a base for homeless people.

King's Wharf and the Waterfront Complex

The city's southern edge is dominated by the gritty industrial area surrounding the docks, overlooked by the chimneys of the Powergen electricity plant and the silos of the National Four Mills factory. With its vast warehouses and jagged skyline of cranes, gantries and mounds of containers, **King's Wharf** is the hub of Trinidad's booming import–export trade. Everything from cars to bananas passes through this hectic port, with most of the action taking place in the early hours when it's still relatively cool. Dredged in the 1930s, the deep-water harbour allowed Port of Spain to accommodate deep-draught ships, boosting Trinidad's economy and consolidating the city's position as the most important southern Caribbean port.

The only let-up in the rows of warehouses and industrial buildings is just across Wrightson Road at the eastern end of Independence Square, where the new **Waterfront Complex** has finally opened up the Gulf of Paria to pedestrians. Completed in 2009 and overlooked by glinting government office blocks, the promenade runs along the seafront past the *Hyatt* hotel and along to the cruise ship pier. It's a popular spot for an evening stroll, when its gushing fountains dance with coloured lights, and you might also want to take in the huge reproductions of local paintings that line the walls of the offices facing Wrightson Road, part of the People's Canvass installation (see p.83). If you've deep pockets you can get a drink or a meal at the *Hyatt*'s oceanside restaurant and bar (see p.93); less expensive drinks are sold from a hole-in-the-wall bar at the *Breakfast Shed*.

South Quay and around

Commonly referred to as **City Gate**, the grand Victorian stone building on South Quay, east of the docks and one block south of Independence Square, was Port of Spain's train station (the line from here to Arima was shut down in the 1960s). It remains Trinidad's **transportation hub** for PTSC buses and maxi taxis running to and from all parts of the country. It's also the site of the main downtown **judging point** during Carnival, and a great base from which to get a good view of the bands passing by.

Built in the 1880s, Port of Spain's **lighthouse** has since been marooned inland by reclamation, and stands in the middle of a traffic island on Wrightson Road next to City Gate; the heavy traffic that thunders past has skewed it five degrees from the vertical. Past the lighthouse, the tail-end of the docks give way to **Sea Lots**, an impoverished squatter community that backs onto **Beetham**, site of the country's main rubbish landfill. Some 875 tonnes of waste find their way here every day, but though the dump has reached its official capacity, plans to have it cleared and rehabilitated have yet to be realized, despite the fact that it sits above the El Socorro aquifer, Trinidad's main source of groundwater.

Fort San Andres

The unassuming cream-painted building two blocks west of City Gate on South Quay sits on the site of **Fort San Andres**, built by the Spanish as the island's only defence against British invasion. The curved wall behind, embedded with rusting cannons, is all that survives of the original 5m-high perimeter, now mostly buried thanks to successive land reclamation projects. When the fort was constructed in 1787, the sea lapped against its ramparts; today it's a good couple of hundred metres inland. The British added a second storey to the original structure, and used it as a customs house and reading room.

Today, its upper floors house a small **museum** (Tues–Fri 9am–5pm; free), with information boards on the **history of Port of Spain** from the Caribs through to the colonial era illustrated with photographs, old street maps and the odd exhibit of household items from the nineteenth century. The section on French Creoles is especially interesting, with plenty of pictures of the "ladies of Port of Spain", and there are also a few examples of traditional mas costumes: Fancy Indian, Baby Doll, Sailor and the like. The adjacent room houses temporary exhibitions, while the forecourt holds the *Hummingbird II* sailboat, on which Harold and Kwailan La Borde circumnavigated the globe in 1965, and a cute old locomotive that shunted along the tracks from Port of Spain to San Fernando before the line closed in 1968.

Frederick Street and Woodford Square

Frederick Street is Port of Spain's main shopping drag, at its busiest between Independence Square and Park Street. Like much of the downtown area, Frederick Street has assumed a modern face in recent years, with many shops accommodated in multistoreyed, air-conditioned malls complete with food courts; sadly, the mall hoardings obscure most of the intricate iron balconies that front the few remaining original buildings. The stalls on the corner of Frederick and Queen streets are all that's left of the **People's Mall**, a rootsy maze of tiny shops selling hand-painted T-shirts, incense and Rasta craft which was razed to the ground in a 2005 fire; many stallholders cried foul play, claiming big business interests in the area had long wanted them out, but so far the promised new construction hasn't materialized.

Woodford Square and around

A block north of the People's Mall, pretty, tree-shaded **Woodford Square** (named after the British governor who had it built in the early nineteenth century) holds a picturesque colonial bandstand and an elegant – if not always functional – cast-iron fountain supported by mermaids and mermen, which dates back to 1866. The square's main claim to fame, however, is as a centre of **political activism**. In 1903, it was the scene of a protest meeting against the introduction of new water rates, which quickly got out of hand – in the ensuing riots, the original Red House was burned to the ground. The square's reputation as a political cockpit really got going in 1956 with the establishment of the "**University of Woodford Square**". This was the brainchild of **Eric Williams** – historian, father of the national independence movement and first prime minister of the country – who delivered hugely popular weekly public lectures here on the issues of the day. In the 1970s, the square became a focal point for the Black Power movement, which renamed it the "people's parliament"; some 30,000 people converged here for the funeral of Basil Davis, a young activist shot dead by the police during a Black Power protest in 1970.

micles
The UNDERGROUND
RAJU'S JEWELLERY

▲ Pan player, Frederick Street

A Trinidadian version of Speaker's Corner, Woodford Square is still a hotbed of political discussion. On the eastern side of the square a blackboard lists the topic for discussion each day; these **debates** typically take place at a rather unsociable 7am and anyone can join in, provided that they can get a word in edgeways – it's not a platform for the faint-hearted or soft-spoken.

The Red House

Beneath its massive green copper cupola (which has been under renovation since 1999, and is masked by a galvanized roof), the imposing Neo-Renaissance **Red House** (Ⓦwww.ttparliament.org) is actually more a faded, peeling, terracotta beneath its coating of scaffolding poles. The seat of Trinidad and Tobago's parliament inherited its popular name from an earlier building on the site, which was painted bright red to celebrate Queen Victoria's diamond jubilee in 1897. The present structure, completed four years after its predecessor was burnt down in the 1903 water riots, was itself attacked in the **1990 coup** (see box, p.74), and bullet holes still scar the stonework; outside the front entrance on Abercromby Street, an eternal flame commemorates the seven government and security personnel who died in the coup. Members of the public can view the **parliament in session** on Fridays at 1.30pm; use the entrance on Knox Street. You can also get a free **tour** of the building (Mon & Thurs 9.30–11.30am), though you need to arrange it at least a week in advance by emailing the Clerk of the House on Ⓔclerkhor@ttparliament.org.

Holy Trinity Cathedral

On the south side of Woodford Square, the Anglican **Holy Trinity Cathedral** was another of Governor Woodford's many initiatives to improve Port of Spain's public spaces. The original idea was to build it in the middle of the square itself, and work was already underway when the governor bowed to popular protest and moved it to its present site. Completed in 1818, the elegant stone structure is built along Gothic lines, with a large clocktower. The cool, shady interior boasts a mahogany hammer-beam roof, made in England and modelled on London's Westminster Hall. A life-size effigy of Governor Woodford lies on his tomb by the south wall; the plaques nearby commemorate various other colonial dignitaries. It's worth taking a stroll around the pretty gardens to see the stonework **labyrinth** at the side of the building opposite the old fire station.

Port of Spain Adult Library and around

The other public buildings around Woodford Square are a mishmash of architectural styles. The oldest and most attractive is the former **Public Library** on the northeast side of the square, a large cream stone building built in 1901 and incongruously sandwiched between two brutally functional slabs of glass and concrete. To the right is the plain **Hall of Justice**; built in 1979, it houses the Supreme Court of Trinidad and Tobago. The concrete pile to the left is the 1961 **City Hall**, home to Port of Spain's council and the mayor's office.

On the southeast side of Woodford Square, the **Port of Spain Adult Library** (Mon–Fri 8.30am–6pm, Sat 8.30am–noon; Ⓣ624 4466 ext 2100, Ⓦwww.nalis.gov.tt) looms over the cut-stone fire station building, itself a handsome old structure suffering from an unfortunate pink paint job. The modern library, with its pod-like exterior lifts, was built to resemble a beached cruise ship – something that's particularly obvious when it's lit up at night. Visitors can become temporary members (you need a local address, passport and TT$20 returnable deposit), which gives you borrowing privileges and one hour's free internet access daily. The **amphitheatre** outside is often used to stage plays and workshops; check the website to see what's on.

The 1990 coup

At 6.30pm on July 27, 1990, **Yasin Abu Bakr** interrupted programming of the state-run TTT TV company to announce that he had captured the station offices and overthrown the government of Trinidad and Tobago. Thirty minutes earlier, members of his Islamic fundamentalist **Jamaat-al-Muslimeen** group had stormed the Red House and taken several government ministers hostage, including then prime minister Arthur Robinson, while the old police headquarters around the corner on Sackville Street had been firebombed and all but destroyed. Looting took the capital by storm, and a **state of emergency** was called, requiring all citizens to remain indoors after dark, and some forty people were killed during the ensuing melee.

The Jamaat-al-Muslimeen had already had many run-ins with the authorities over a land dispute and the killing of one of its members by the police. Relying on the army to support the revolt, they also hoped to capitalize on public discontent with the government's harsh fiscal policies (satirized by the calypsonian Sparrow in his song *Capitalism Gone Mad*). Yet however little love they may have had for the government, few Trinidadians were willing to support its violent overthrow by an armed group of religious extremists. With little public support (and with food rations running low – the Muslimeen hadn't prepared for a drawn-out standoff), the rebels surrendered to the troops surrounding the Red House after a six-day siege, though only after negotiating an amnesty agreement which guaranteed that perpetrators of the coup would not be arrested for their activities. Nonetheless, Bakr and 113 other Jamaat members were taken into custody as soon as they surrendered, and remained in jail for two years while the courts debated the validity of the amnesty which, they said, had been granted only as a means of preventing the hostages from being killed. The Jamaat members were eventually set free after a ruling by the UK Privy Council that the amnesty was invalid, but that it would be against due process to have the suspects re-arrested and tried for the offences committed during the coup. At the time of the coup, meanwhile, many Trinidadians found it hard to believe that such events could take place in their stable, democratic, fun-loving country. With characteristic humour, though, the crisis was soon turned into a fount of amusing stories. Ask any Trinidadian about the coup and you will hear tales of wild "**curfew parties**" and imaginative explanations given to the police of the five TVs found in a neighbour's house.

Today, the Jamaat-al-Muslimeen is still active; their **headquarters** at 1 Mucurapo Rd on the outskirts of Woodbrook hold a school and a mosque (there are also four other mosques dotted around the country), and membership – currently at around 6800 nationally – continues to rise despite allegations of links with terrorist groups and charges of murder and drug smuggling. In February 2006, the government **sued** Bakr and threatened to seize and sell land owned by the Muslimeen to recover a $32 million debt they say was incurred by the damages to the police headquarters during the coup. The case rumbles on, as do allegations that Patrick Manning's PNM government provided covert financial backing for the Muslimeen in return for support (and strong-arming of votes in communities such as Laventille) during the 2002 election campaign. Whether this can be proved remains to be seen, but calls for an enquiry into the coup continue to go unanswered.

Central Police Station

Though it might look like a church, the elegant stone building at the corner of Sackville and St Vincent streets, with its variegated brickwork and arched windows, is a renovated version of the **Central Police Station**, which was pretty much destroyed in the 1990 coup. The upper floor holds a small **museum** (Tues 10am–6pm, Sat 10am–3pm; free) centred around T&T's police service. Highlights include an old warrant book from 1941, in which the offences detailed include "fraudulent conversing" and "larceny of a fountain pen"; and a duty book from the same era which includes a complaint by one Monica Darlington of Delaford, who dropped into the station to report that one "Mrs Blackman and her daughter Viva are always annoying her" – a far cry from the news which makes the headlines these days. Equally fascinating is a Criminal Register from 1882, with each page devoted to the crimes of the unhappy suspect in the photo at the top; most of the offences seem to centre around "theft of a fowl". The stairwell up to the gallery is bedecked with tributes to former Commissioners of Police alongside pictures of the Red House ablaze during the 1903 water riots; look out also for the foxy picture of WPC Pearl Trim, the first female officer assigned to motorbike patrol.

Opposite the Central Police Station, on the other side of Sackville Street, is the **police administrative building**, which displays Trinidad and Tobago's police force emblem, a hummingbird and a police badge inside a Star of David, the latter the symbol not of a Jewish connection but of Governor Picton's patron saint.

Rosary Church and the Caribbean Court of Justice

At the corner of Henry and Park streets stands the **Rosary Roman Catholic Church**. Built between 1892 and 1910, this dignified Gothic Revival building is the most impressive of the city's three main churches, though its imposing towers and ornate stonework are hemmed in by buildings on all sides. You're in luck if you find it open, for the spacious interior is an oasis of peace in this hectic part of the city, and the old **stained glass**, with its finely detailed Biblical scenes, is the most beautiful in Port of Spain. Unfortunately the effect is somewhat spoilt by the fluorescent lighting, peeling paint and general dilapidation.

Just up from here, at 134 Henry St (between Duke and Park streets) stands the shiny headquarters of the embattled **Caribbean Court of Justice** (Ⓦwww.caribbeancourtofjustice.org), the region's new appellate court. As only two countries (Barbados and Guyana) had fully ratified the CCJ as their final court of appeal at the time of writing, it's a rather sad testament to the seemingly unachievable goal of Caribbean unanimity.

Uptown Port of Spain

Ranged around the broad, grassy expanse of the **Queen's Park Savannah** and framed by the foothills of the Northern Range, Port of Spain's **uptown** area oozes prosperity. Along the wide boulevards that ring the Savannah, palatial mansions built by the colonial plantocracy compete for attention with the residences of the republic's president and prime minister and glitzy modern company headquarters, while the leafy backstreets are home to the country's well-to-do as well as most of the diplomatic missions. This part of town also boasts Port of Spain's main tourist attractions: a comprehensive **museum**, a passable **zoo** and the beautiful **botanical gardens**.

Queen's Park Savannah

The **Queen's Park Savannah** is Port of Spain's largest open space, surrounded by a 3.7-km perimeter road, crisscrossed by paths and shaded by the spreading branches of some lovely trees, from huge samaans and pink and yellow pouis to fragrant carobs. Originally part of a sugar cane estate, the Savannah was bought by Governor Woodford in 1817 and developed into a city park. The terms of the sale decreed that no permanent structures would be erected on the land, but though the Savannah has remained its original size, tarmac and Carnival-related buildings

▲ Panorama practice session on the Savannah tracks

on the southern portion are slowly encroaching onto the grass. The only other construction is the walled Peschier cemetery right in the middle, the burial ground of the original French Creole owners and closed to the public.

Pretty much deserted during the hot daylight hours, the Savannah comes to life in the cool of the afternoon, with football games and cricket matches on the grass, and walkers and joggers exercising along the boundary path. During the windy months of March and April, the Savannah is also a favourite spot for flying **kites**; visit at this time and you'll usually be able to buy one of the brilliant home-made Mad Bulls, T&T's kite of choice, sold by a roving craftsman. Over on the paved area, meanwhile, stalls set up as the light fades and do a roaring trade in snacks such as pholouri, corn soup, roasted corn and barbecue chicken; if you're feeling adventurous, try the oysters doused in peppery tomato sauce, dispensed from a stall opposite the Knowsley Building on Queen's Park West.

The Savannah has long been the centrepiece of Carnival celebrations, home to the **Panorama** steel pan competition and **Dimanche Gras** show, as well as serving as the main stage for the **Parade of the Bands**. For many years, the culmination of Carnival for masqueraders was crossing the stage between the Grandstand and North Stand, just back from the road off Queen's Park West, but much to the consternation of locals, both structures were demolished in 2007. Since then, the judging point has been moved to the road, and though Panorama and other events are still held in semi-permanent structures knocked up to replace the original stands, many look back with nostalgia at the days of a Savannah stage that allowed bands to properly portray their presentations; others, such as renowned mas-maker Peter Minshall, argue that given the predominance of bikini-and-feathers "pretty mas" these days, Carnival is pretty dead as an art form in any case, and has outgrown the need for a platform to put on a proper show. The five-level **National Carnival Arts Centre** that was supposed to replace the stands has never materialized, and the future of Carnival on the Savannah remains in limbo. Across the road from the old site, the new **National Academy for the Performing Arts** glowers over the grass, its rows of fountains and arcs of glass and steel looking somewhat absurd next to the surrounding colonial-era buildings. Built at a cost of some TT$500 million by Patrick Manning's PNM government, the controversial centre has been lambasted as a white elephant, constructed to shoddy standards and with numerous design flaws (from dance studios completely unsuited to dance to an analogue rather than digital sound and light system). Whether NAPA will stand up to the test of time remains to be seen, but its mauve-lit neon bulk certainly makes an interesting if incongruous addition to the city skyline.

The National Museum and Art Gallery

A block south of the Savannah at the corner of Frederick and Keate streets, and now overshadowed by the NAPA building, the gabled Royal Victoria Institute was built in 1892 as part of the preparations for Queen Victoria's jubilee; today, however, it holds the **National Museum and Art Gallery** (Tues–Sat 10am–6pm, Sun 2–6pm; free; ☎623 5941). The museum's collection is extensive, covering everything from early **Amerindian history** to the technology of the **oil industry**. Although the exhibits vary considerably in quality, they provide an essential overview of Trinidad and Tobago's history and culture (though the section on Carnival had been taken down for restoration at the time of writing). Note, however, that the museum is slated to move to the Knowsley Building on Queen's Park West, though when this will happen is as yet unconfirmed.

On the ground floor, you enter into a room taken up with the **geological history** of the islands, with racks of locally found specimens including some enormous quartz crystals. There's also plenty on the **colonial era** and beyond, including pictures of the long-defunct tram and trolley-bus networks, a re-creation of a 1940s **barrack yard** and yellowing photos of Port of Spain through the ages, including shots of the devastation wreaked by the 1808 fire. Local industry, from coconuts and cocoa to sugar, rum and oil, are also covered, and around the back, there's a nice little exhibit on the Shouter Baptist faith, with examples of items used for prayer, and a gallery detailing T&T's sporting achievements sponsored – with no hint of irony – by the local tobacco company, WITCO. There's also a room dedicated to Trinbago's music, from calypso to soca and rapso, with a nice montage of newspaper headings covering one wall, a calypso timeline and vintage tunes and footage playing on a video screen. To the rear of the building, across a courtyard with its battery of colonial-era cannons, another room is used to stage temporary exhibitions.

The upper level is mostly given over to **Trinbagonian art**, either pieces from the museum's collection or temporary exhibitions by local artists. The works change frequently, but you'll usually see pieces by big names such as Leroy Clarke, Shastri Mahraj, Carlisle Chang and Boscoe Holder. Elsewhere, there's a room exploring T&T's natural history, with stuffed birds and animals, pickled snakes and desiccated spiders and insects, another dedicated to the original Amerindian inhabitants, with heaps of pottery, a re-creation of a burial midden and a dug-out canoe, and a room filled with lithographs of old Port of Spain and bucolic scenes of rural Trinidad by nineteenth-century painter **Michel Cazabon**, a French Creole man who became Trinidad's first internationally known artist.

Queen's Park West

Travelling clockwise around the Savannah from Frederick Street on **Queen's Park West**, you'll come across numerous examples of the gingerbread buildings by Glaswegian architect George Brown, who mass-produced this distinctive fretted woodwork and used it extensively on his designs. Dating from 1904, the ornately decorated **Knowsley Building** at the corner of Chancery Lane resembles a child's fantasy doll's house; the black and white **George Brown House** at the corner of Victoria Avenue is somewhat plainer, though still graced by a great deal of refined fretwork. Just up from the junction with Cipriani Boulevard, **Boissiere House** is fondly called the "Gingerbread House" by locals, and you'd be hard pushed to find a better example of the style. It's a splendidly whimsical concoction of fretted wooden finials and bargeboards, with stained glass depicting meandering strawberry vines and a pagoda-like roofs. Sadly, however, its owners put it up for sale in 2008; no buyer has yet been found, and pressure from local groups for the building to be purchased by the government and given protected status has so far gone unheeded.

The Magnificent Seven

Overlooking the northeast corner of the Savannah along Maraval Road, the magical-realist parade of buildings known as the **Magnificent Seven** are the result of the competing egos of rival plantation owners, each of whom tried to outdo his neighbours in the grandeur of their construction. Employing assorted European architectural styles infused with a tropical slant, the buildings were constructed in 1904 (except Hayes Court, which dates from 1910), but though three remain in regular use, the rest have been allowed to fall into a state of disrepair and are slowly becoming derelict, with signs announcing restoration looking as weatherbeaten as the structures themselves.

Going from south to north, the first of the seven is the newly restored **Queen's Royal College**, Trinidad's most prestigious school, whose former pupils include the authors V.S. and Shiva Naipaul and the country's first prime minister, Eric Williams. Built along Germanic Renaissance lines and topped with a clocktower, its arcaded balconies and cream-and-ochre stucco offset the blue limestone cornerstones. Across Hayes Street, **Hayes Court** is the residence of Trinidad's Anglican bishop, a grand mansion fusing French and British architectural influences. Next door, **Mille Fleurs** is an elaborate gingerbread house originally built for Dr Henrique Prada, a well-to-do doctor who went on to serve as the city's mayor between 1914 and 1917. The next building along is **Roomor**, commissioned by estate owner Lucien Ambard and a florid exercise in French Baroque, slathered with Italian marble and tiles from France, its columns, galleries, towers and pinnacles decorated with elaborate ironwork. Crossing Flood Street, you'll come to the official home of Port of Spain's Roman Catholic archbishop, **Archbishop's House**, a weighty, Neo-Romanesque pile of Irish marble and red granite, capped by a copper roof.

The next house along is **Whitehall**, a Venetian-style palazzo whose gleaming white paintwork gives it the air of a freshly iced birthday cake. Originally the home of cocoa estate owner Joseph Leon Agostini, the building has had a somewhat chequered history. It was commandeered by the US military during World War II, after which it became a cultural centre, a library and then a broadcasting unit. In 1954 it was sold to the Trinidadian government and now houses the Office of the Prime Minister. The most outlandish structure of the seven, **Killarney** stands at the northern end of Maraval Road just before it veers east into Circular Road. A fairy-tale castle of brick and limestone, bristling with turrets and spires, it was built for a German plantation owner named Stollmeyer (locals know the building as "Stollmeyer's Castle") by the Scottish architect Robert Giles, who modelled it on Queen Victoria's residence at Balmoral. Architectural historian John Newel Lewis perfectly captured Killarney's delicious absurdity when he wrote: "A German built a bit of an untypical Scottish castle in Trinidad and called it by an Irish name. He must have been by that time a Trinidadian, because only

Trinidadians do these things." The Stollmeyer family sold the castle to the government in 1979, and it has since entered rapid decline, though a board outside promises imminent restoration.

The Emperor Valley Zoo, Botanical Gardens and President's House

Continuing clockwise past the dips and depressions of the Hollows sunken garden, with its fishponds and pathways, the Savannah's perimeter road (now Circular Road) passes the turn-off to **Lady Chancellor Road**, a precipitous meander of switchback turns that winds it way up the hillside past some palatial homes. A popular spot for afternoon walkers and joggers, Chancellor affords some lovely views over the Savannah and across the city skyline. It also marks the western boundary of the **Emperor Valley Zoo** (daily 9.30am–6pm, last tickets sold at 5.30pm; TT$15), a surprisingly nice place to while away an hour or two. Originally opened in 1952, the zoo's original design wasn't particularly animal-friendly, with tiny cages predominating, but all this looks set to change, by way of an ambitious enhancement programme underway at the time of writing, which will include upgrades to enclosures, a butterfly park, hummingbird area and a Discovery Centre, with displays on local species. A magnet for local kids, with balloon- and novelty-sellers aplenty at the entrance, the zoo is home to all the Trinidadian species that you're unlikely to see in the wild, alongside animals from around the world. Residents include **brocket deer**, **quenk**, **otters**, **capybara**, **lions**, **tigers**, a large selection of **monkeys** (including a cage of native howlers behind the reptile house), aquarium **fish** and **snakes** – a large albino Burmese python is often paraded around by its keeper to the delight (or not) of patrons. There are also tarantulas and one of Trinidad's improbably large giant centipedes, as well as ocelots, **spectacled caiman** and numerous **birds**, including parrots, toucans and scarlet ibis.

Next door to the zoo, and spreading east toward the President's House, the lovely **Botanical Gardens** (daily 6am–6pm; free) were established in 1818 by Governor Woodford and the botanist David Lockhart, and the collection of 700-odd trees is one of the oldest in the western hemisphere. Paths loop around the lawns and up the bamboo-smothered hillsides, and a small **cemetery** in the middle contains the crumbling gravestones of many of the island's governors, including Solomon Hochoy. It's a lovely spot for a wander, often deserted during the heat of the day but more lively in the late afternoon, when joggers, walkers and families take to the paths and lawns.

Behind the gardens, in equally well-kept grounds, the austere, stately **President's House** was built in 1876 as the residence of the island's British governors. The grounds are closed to the public, but you can get a good view of the building from inside the Botanical Gardens. Hidden from sight behind the President's House, and likewise closed to the public, is the **Prime Minister's Residence**, treated to a lavish upgrade by PNM incumbent Patrick Manning in 2008 and now boasting such fancy accoutrements as a night-lit moat spanned by a Greco-Roman style bridge alongside the diplomatic centre and media suite. The eventual TT$244 million price tag for the rebuild and redecoration remains enormously controversial.

At the next turn-off from the Savannah past the Botanical Gardens, a roundabout has exits for St Ann's Road and Cascade, and for **Lady Young Road**, a steep and twisting route up past the *Hilton* hotel and into the hills; a **viewing point** some ten minutes' drive from the Savannah affords excellent views over the city and of the container ships queuing up in the Gulf of Paria. Stalls sell Trini sweets and corn soup at the weekends.

Newtown and St Clair

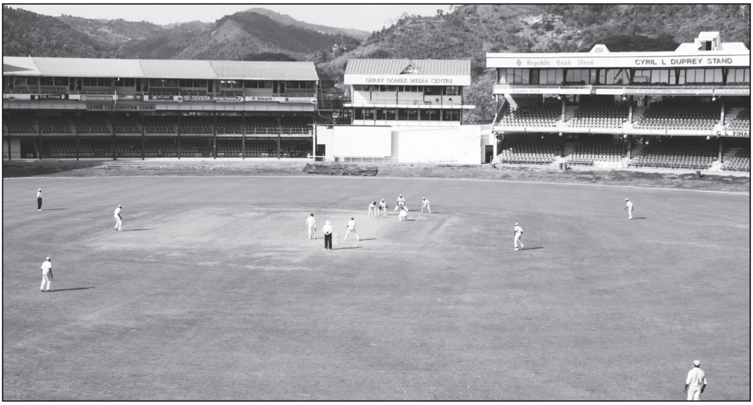
Southeast of the Savannah, the rough triangle bordered by Tragarete Road holds Port of Spain's most chi-chi neighbourhoods. A network of narrow streets between Maraval Road and Queen's Park West, **NEWTOWN** holds some pretty colonial-era buildings, most housing offices these days, as well as a couple of good places to eat and stay, but no sights per se. West of Maraval Road, **ST CLAIR** is an exclusive enclave of lavish houses protected by high walls, barking guard dogs and sophisticated security systems; if you peek through the fences, you'll see some lovely examples of well-kept colonial-era mansions. The area is also home to the **Harts mas camp** at 5 Alcazar St, run by the same family since 1959. Famous for their skimpy feathers-and-beads designs, Harts were the first to market themselves as a "fun" band and have been at the forefront of the development of bikini mas.

Woodbrook and St James

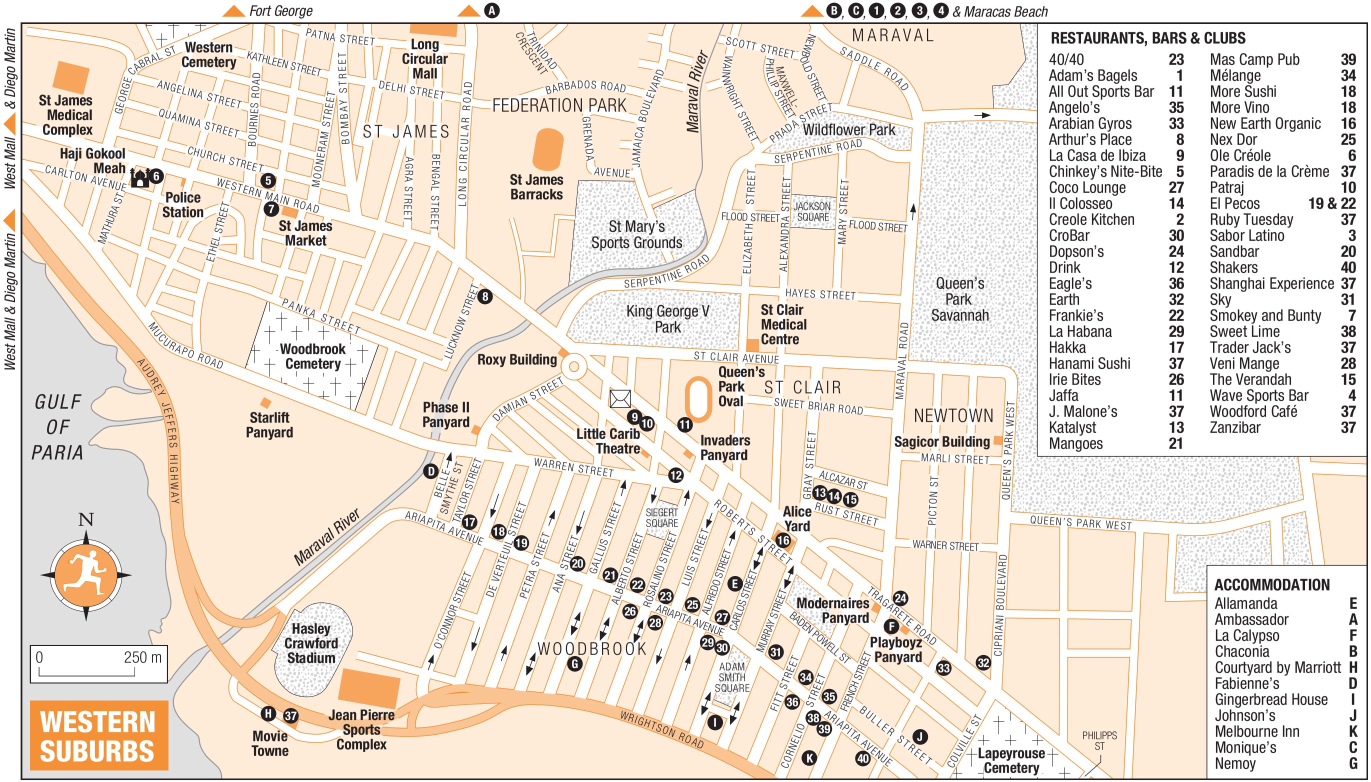
A tight jostle of residential and commercial streets spreading back from the Gulf of Paria, Port of Spain's western suburbs are very much part of the city. Immediately west of the downtown area, **Woodbrook** is centred around the wide boulevard of Ariapita Avenue, the capital's primary liming and dining location, lined with bars and restaurants and a lively place to be most nights of the week. The Avenue is also one of the busiest parts of town during Carnival, with a main judging point at Adam Smith Square, and stalls and crowds lining the tarmac. Woodbrook's backstreets, meanwhile, hold a healthy sprinkling of mas camps, where the Carnival bands have their bases, as well as a host of inexpensive guesthouses. To the northwest, past the Queen's Park Oval cricket ground, Woodbrook merges into the grittier district of **St James**, a cosmopolitan place with a strong East Indian presence that's known as the "city that never sleeps" thanks to the string of bars and street-food stalls along the Western Main Road.

Woodbrook

Bounded by Philipps Street to the east and the Maraval River to the west, the elegant old district of **WOODBROOK** was established in the early twentieth century on land that once formed part of a sugar estate owned by the Siegert



▲ Queen's Park Oval cricket ground


Fort George
A
B, C, 1, 2, 3, 4 & Maracas Beach
West Mall & Diego Martin
West Mall & Diego Martin
MARAVAL
FEDERATION PARK
ST JAMES
ST CLAIR
NEWTOWN
WOODBROOK
GULF OF PARIA
St James Medical Complex
Western Cemetery
Long Circular Mall
Haji Gokool Meah
Police Station
St James Market
St James Barracks
St Mary's Sports Grounds
Wildflower Park
King George V Park
St Clair Medical Centre
Queen's Park Savannah
Queen's Park Oval
Roxy Building
Woodbrook Cemetery
Starlift Panyard
Phase II Panyard
Little Carib Theatre
Invaders Panyard
Sagicor Building
Alice Yard
Modernaires Panyard
Playboyz Panyard
Lapeyrouse Cemetery
Hasley Crawford Stadium
Jean Pierre Sports Complex
Movie Towne
Maraval River
Maraval River
JACKSON SQUARE
SIEGERT SQUARE
ADAM SMITH SQUARE
CABRAL ST
PATNA STREET
KATHLEEN STREET
DELHI STREET
GEORGE
ANGELINA STREET
QUAMINA STREET
CHURCH STREET
CARLTON AVENUE
MATHURA ST
WESTERN MAIN ROAD
ETHEL STREET
BOURNES ROAD
MOONERAM STREET
BOMBAY STREET
AGRA STREET
BENGAL STREET
LONG CIRCULAR ROAD
TRINIDAD CRESCENT
BARBADOS ROAD
GRENADA AVENUE
JAMAICA BOULEVARD
SCOTT STREET
NEWBOLD STREET
MAXWELL-PHILLIP STREET
WAINWRIGHT STREET
PRADA STREET
SADDLE ROAD
SERPENTINE ROAD
FLOOD STREET
ELIZABETH STREET
ALEXANDRA STREET
MARY STREET
HAYES STREET
ST CLAIR AVENUE
SWEET BRIAR ROAD
MARAVAL ROAD
QUEEN'S PARK WEST
MARLI STREET
PICTON ST
WARNER STREET
CIPRIANI BOULEVARD
GRAY STREET
ALCAZAR ST
RUST STREET
LUCKNOW STREET
PANKA STREET
MUCURAPO ROAD
AUDREY JEFFERS HIGHWAY
DAMIAN STREET
WARREN STREET
BELLE-SMYTHE ST
TAYLOR STREET
ARIAPITA AVENUE
DE VERTEUIL STREET
PETRA STREET
ANA STREET
GALLUS STREET
ALBERTO STREET
ROSALINO STREET
LUIS STREET
ALFREDO STREET
CARLOS STREET
MURRAY STREET
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RESTAURANTS, BARS & CLUBS

40/40	23
Adam's Bagels	1
All Out Sports Bar	11
Angelo's	35
Arabian Gyros	33
Arthur's Place	8
La Casa de Ibiza	9
Chinkey's Nite-Bite	5
Coco Lounge	27
Il Colosseo	14
Creole Kitchen	2
CroBar	30
Dopson's	24
Drink	12
Eagle's	36
Earth	32
Frankie's	22
La Habana	29
Hakka	17
Hanami Sushi	37
Irie Bites	26
Jaffa	11
J. Malone's	37
Katalyst	13
Mangoes	21
Mas Camp Pub	39
Mélange	34
More Sushi	18
More Vino	18
New Earth Organic	16
Nex Dor	25
Ole Créole	6
Paradis de la Crème	37
Patraj	10
El Pecos	19 & 22
Ruby Tuesday	37
Sabor Latino	3
Sandbar	20
Shakers	40
Shanghai Experience	37
Sky	31
Smokey and Bunty	7
Sweet Lime	38
Trader Jack's	37
Veni Mange	28
The Verandah	15
Wave Sports Bar	4
Woodford Café	37
Zanzibar	37

ACCOMMODATION

Allamanda	E
Ambassador	A
La Calypso	F
Chaconia	B
Courtyard by Marriott	H
Fabienne's	D
Gingerbread House	I
Johnson's	J
Melbourne Inn	K
Monique's	C
Nemoy	G

family, creators of Trinidad's famous Angostura Bitters (see p.89). Many of the streets here – such as Carlos, Luis and Siegert – bear their names, and you'll still see plenty of the houses built by the original middle-class inhabitants, with wonderful fretworked bargeboards and delicate balustrades and finials.

At Woodbrook's eastern edge, on Philipps Street, is the entrance to the **Lapeyrouse Cemetery** (daily 6am–6pm), a walled burial ground dating back to 1813. Victorian tombs adorned with Gothic spires and angels are eerily framed against the lush, tropical backdrop, while strands of ivy trail over the graves. The Siegert family are buried here, as are the labour leader Arthur Cipriani, the calypsonian Melody, and Charlie King, the policeman killed in the Butler Riots in the 1930s (see box, p.195). The names on the gravestones provide clues to the diverse origins – Chinese, Spanish,

Mas camps, playing mas and Jouvert

Mas camps (the workshops in which Carnival costumes are made) are established throughout Port of Spain, with the majority in Woodbrook. In the months prior to Carnival, they become mini-factories littered with wire, sequins, feathers and glue-guns, where dedicated mas-makers (many of whom are unpaid volunteers) labour away to get the designs finished in time for the big day. Traditionally, mas camps provided a focus for the Trinidadian arts community, with many a painter, actor, dancer or writer pitching in to make mas, but these days, with many costumes produced in the Far East and shipped over to be assembled here, fewer and fewer of the camps are places where costumes are actually made. Instead, they serve as a showcase for the designs, where potential masqeraders can get an up-close view of the various sections that make up a band; they're also the place where revellers register to play mas and, often, collect their costumes (though the larger bands often distribute at bigger venues such as the National Stadium or *Hilton* hotel).

Each band chooses a **theme** to portray during Carnival; this could be anything from animals to a historical period. The band is then divided into different named **sections**, each with its own costume linked to the general theme, and with a designated position within the band during the Monday and Tuesday parades (note that it's fine for masqeraders to wander through the band when on the road, but you must stay with your section at judging points). Anyone with the inclination and the money to pay for the costume can register with the band to "play mas". In recent years, **costumes** have increasingly catered to the desire to wear as little as possible in the heat, including thongs and Rio-style cage bras for women; most female costumes, though, consist of a decorated bikini top and belt, plus bikini pants, a headpiece and accessories for the arms and legs; male costumes are less elaborate, usually board shorts, a small headpiece and some kind of sash around the chest. If skimpy "pretty mas" doesn't appeal, you could play with a steel band such as All Stars or Woodbrook Modernaires (see p.88) that produce simple costume bands, or opt for MacFarlane, winner of band of the year from 2007 to 2010 and one of the few bands that still make more elaborate, artistic and traditional creations.

If you want to play mas, you must first **register** to join a mas band; you can do this online at the websites listed below; otherwise, go directly to the mas camp and try your luck. All-inclusive registration packages, including costume and food and drink during the Monday and Tuesday parades costs anything from TT$2000 to TT$5000. Note also that if you wish to play in the ever-popular Tribe, you'll need to check the Trinidad Carnival Diary website in early summer to find out when registration begins, as the band always sells out within a few days. If you arrive in Trinidad late or decide you want to play mas at the last minute, bear in mind that bands sell uncollected costumes on the Sunday before the main parade; you can also pick up a costume on the ⓦwww.carnivaljunction.com site.

African, Indian and European – of Port of Spain's inhabitants, and the inscriptions reflect its varied religious affiliations: Catholics, Anglicans, Baptists and many other faiths are represented. The cemetery's newer residents, the vagrants who sleep in the more dilapidated tombs, have been a talking point for years, often provoking press articles about the problem of homelessness.

At the western end of **Tragarete Road**, itself lined by a mix of shops, restaurants and offices, stands the **Queen's Park Oval** (daily 8am–4pm; ask the security guard at the gate to let you in; ⓦwww.qpcc.com), resplendent following a refit in honour of the 2007 Cricket World Cup; the perimeter walls, meanwhile, house huge reproductions of paintings and photographs by local artists as part of the People's Canvas exhibition. Cricket fans might also want to check out the Oval's

The list below represents a selection of the best-known large and medium **mas bands** in Port of Spain: for a full list, contact the National Carnival Bands Association (ⓣ627 1422, ⓦwww.ncbatt.com); more reliably, consult the brilliant Trinidad Carnival Diary blog: ⓦwww.saucytrini.blogspot.com. The site ⓦwww.tntisland.com/mas.html lists lots of small and medium bands. Note that the Callaloo Company (ⓣ634 4491, ⓦwww.callaloo.co.tt), band of designer extraordinaire Peter Minshall (see p.109), hasn't brought out a Carnival band since 2006, but rumours of a comeback surface each year. Note also that new bands surface each year; check the sites above for updates.

As well as playing mas, you might want to join an organized **Jouvert band** for the Sunday/Monday "dirty mas"; a fee of US$40–60 will get you a basic costume, drinks and all the mud, body paint or liquid chocolate you desire, as well as security (an excellent idea, as Jouvert can be wild) and breakfast at the end of it all. The list below comprises some of the most popular bands; we've given addresses for those with a permanent base. New bands appear each year; listen to radio adverts or check the press for details. For more on Jouvert, see p.276.

Carnival bands

D Krewe 62 Warren Street, Woodbrook ⓣ622-8834, ⓦwww.dkrewecarnival.com

Dream Team 76 Picton St, Newtown ⓣ627 4004, ⓦwww.dreamteamtnt.com

Harts 5 Alcazar St, St Clair ⓣ622 8038, ⓦwww.hartscarnival.com

Island People 50 O'Connor St, Woodbrook ⓣ622 8145, ⓦwww.islandpeoplemas.com

Legacy 88 Roberts St, Woodbrook ⓣ622 7466, ⓦwww.legacycarnival.com

Mac Farlane 49 Rosalino St, Woodbrook ⓣ628 4168, ⓦwww.macfarlanecarnival.net

Pulse 8 6 Gallus St, Woodbrook ⓣ627 8330, ⓦwww.pulse8carnival.com

Ronnie and Caro 29 Ariapita Avenue, Woodbrook ⓣ627 6945, ⓦwww.ronnieandcaro.com.

Spice 65 Rosalino St, Woodbrook ⓣ222 0475, ⓦwww.spicecarnivalband.com

Tribe 20 Rosalino St, Woodbrook ⓣ625 6800, ⓦwww.carnivaltribe.com

Trini Revellers 35 Gallus St, Woodbrook ⓣ628 7275, ⓦwww.trinirevellersmas.com

Jouvert bands

3canal 67a Ariapita Ave ⓣ623 7411 or 623 0982, ⓦwww.3canal.com

Chocolate City ⓣ685 0738, ⓦchocolatecitymastt.com

Mas Jumbies ⓣ480 3961, ⓦwww.masjumbies.com

Mudders International Long Circular Rd, corner of Barbados Rd ⓣ680 0792, ⓔmuddersinternational@gmail.com

Yellow Devils ⓣ681 4972, ⓦwww.yellowdevilz.com

Cricket Heritage Museum, which opens by appointment only (☎753 2775; US$10); highlights include a bat signed by the 1950s West Indies team that won the region's first Test against England at Lords, and the three bats that the legendary Brian Lara used to hit home his record-breaking 370, 400 and 501 Test runs. Originally built in 1896, Queen's Park is Trinidad's premier **cricket ground**, hosting national and international matches in season (Feb–April), as well as doubling as an occasional concert venue at Carnival time. Even if you're not a cricket fan, attending a match here is a unique and hugely enjoyable experience; the game is a national obsession in Trinidad, and matches are followed with a passion. The atmosphere is rowdy but good-natured, with fans draped in the national flag and music blaring from sound systems after every over and wicket. Seats in the stands cost TT$40–200 depending on the level of the match taking place, or you can pay TT$250–300 for an all-inclusive ticket to the Trini Posse stand (food and drink included). For box office information, call ☎622 2295.

St James

The area of today's **ST JAMES** was the first place that the British set foot on Trinidadian soil; landing in 1797, they are said to have found the courage required to capture Port of Spain in the rum produced at what was then the Peru sugar cane estate. After emancipation, the area was settled by **Indian** indentured labourers, and the names they gave to their streets – Calcutta, Delhi and Madras – bear witness to their homesickness. Today, the estate is long-gone, but rum remains central to the life of the area by way of the streetfront bars and slightly seedy clubs that line the Western Main Road, best visited after dark when music blares and stalls serve food late into the night for queues of hungry limers. St James' Indian population have also stayed very visible, with a smattering of mosques and puja flags in many front gardens along the residential backstreets. The area is also notable as the focus of the annual Muslim **Hosay** processions (see box opposite).

Approaching St James from Woodbrook, at the start of the Western Main Road, the **Roxy Building** was built as a cinema, but its ritzy classical-modern colonnade now houses a branch of *Pizza Hut*. On the other side of the road is a statue in tribute to the grandmaster of calypso, the late **Lord Kitchener**. The entrance to St James itself is marked by the bridge over the Maraval River, spanned by an ornate green-and-pink iron **archway** bearing the area's name, decorated with shells and with eight Hindu-style domes. Overhanging it all are the ugly high-rise blocks of One Woodbrook Place, an exclusive gated community with its own shops, restaurants and gym.

Western Main Road, which runs through the centre of St James, is a broad thoroughfare lined with shops, bars and takeaways. Street vendors sell vegetables, incense and household goods on corners during the day, while at night there's a food, punch or home-made ice cream stall every couple of metres. Halfway down the road, **St James Market** fills the air with the smell of fresh fish and meat in the early mornings. Towards the western end of the road you'll see the **Haji Gokool Meah Mosque**, one of the oldest in Trinidad and unfortunately not open to the public. Built in 1927, this tiny white-and-green minareted building is typical of Muslim places of worship found throughout the island.

Fort George

Perched on a hilltop above St James ten minutes' drive north of the Western Main Road, **Fort George** (daily 10am–6pm; free) affords some spectacular views of Port of Spain and beyond into Caroni and the Central Plains, as well as west along the coast to the Bocas. Taxis leave sporadically from the corner of Western Main Road and Bourne's Road; the route up passes through some slightly dodgy areas,

Hosay

The Islamic festival of **Hosay**, commemorating the martyrdom of Mohammed's grandsons Hussein and Hassan during the jihad (Holy War) in Persia, has been celebrated in Trinidad since the first Indian Muslims arrived in 1845. The festival's exposure to the island's other cultures has turned it into something resembling Carnival, with wining and loud music, but in recent years local Shi'a Muslims have taken great pains to restore the occasion's solemnity. This hasn't stopped St James' bars from making a mint on Hosay night, however – many locals watch the proceedings with a beer or rum in hand, much to the consternation of devout Muslims.

Hosay is celebrated in Curepe, Tunapuna, Couva and Cedros, but the best place to see it is undoubtedly St James. Trinis of all religions come here to view the festivities, which are held over four days (dates change according to the Islamic calendar; see Ⓦwww.bestoftrinidad.com/culture.html). All of the night parades start at 11pm and continue into the early hours of the morning.

In the weeks leading up to Hosay, it's possible to watch craftsmen in St James building *tadjahs*, the ornate tombs made from bamboo and coloured paper that are carried in procession; the houses where they work have large flags planted in their yards. There are only five families who build the structures each year, four based in St James and one in Cocorite. Families have to be approved by a local committee, and strict rules apply – they must be the direct descendants of Indian immigrants with an ancestral tradition of *tadjah* building. The task involves great financial, physical and spiritual sacrifice; the materials can cost thousands of dollars, and the builders have to fast during daylight hours and refrain from alcohol and sexual activity for the duration. Understandably, perhaps, not many of the younger generation find the prospect appealing, and as the years pass fewer and fewer *tadjahs* are being built.

The first procession is **flag night**, when hundreds of devotees walk through the streets with multicoloured flags representing the beginning of the battle of Kerbala, in which the brothers lost their lives.

On the **second night**, two small *tadjahs* are carried slowly through the streets to the throbbing beat of tassa drums; the shredded paper fires at the side of the road are there to warm up the drums, which tightens the skins and produces a better sound.

The **third night** is the most spectacular. Large *tadjahs* more than 2m high are paraded through the streets, while dancers carry two large sickle moons representing the two brothers. At midnight there is the ritual "kissing of the moons", as the dancers symbolically re-enact a brotherly embrace.

On the **fourth day**, after the moons have been paraded through the streets, the exquisite *tadjahs* are traditionally thrown into the sea, a sacrifice to ensure that prayers for recovery from sickness and adversity will be answered. These days, however, most *tadjahs* are disposed of in more environmentally friendly ways. The celebrations usually finish at around 7pm.

so it's best not to walk. The fort was built in 1804 to defend the island against the French Caribbean fleet during the Napoleonic Wars, though it never saw any action; the original cannons still point out to sea.

Stone defensive walls surround the wooden **signal station** designed by an exiled West African prince, Kofi Nti, who came to Trinidad after becoming a Ward of the British courts following the Ashanti war of 1872; he's described on the information boards as a "quiet, unassuming man with a great interest in stamp collecting". The station itself was used to signal between here and the other post stations along the coast, and the bare interior displays an ornate, armoured wooden chest from Marseilles, thought to have been brought here to store valuables. Though the fort's lock-up looks secure enough – check out the window bars made from rifle barrels – the only thing it ever guarded were the valuables of Port of Spain's merchants, who carted their treasures up here whenever the threat of insurrection loomed.

The **grounds** are dotted with picnic tables, and make a popular spot to come and get a little respite from the city, with a constant cooling breeze.

The eastern suburbs

Port of Spain's **eastern suburbs**, which nestle on the lower slopes of the Northern Range, are the oldest part of the city. In **Belmont**, many original wooden houses survive from the era of the area's first settlers, while the buildings of **Laventille** – the city's most impoverished and crime-ridden area – seem to tumble over one another down Laventille Hill. The birthplace of the steel pan, Laventille still has some important panyards in its winding lanes, as well as some lovely old buildings, but due to the volatility of the area, it's not a place for a casual wander. Also in the hills, north of the Queen's Park Savannah and downtown Port of Spain, **St Ann's** is a far cry from Laventille: an upscale neighbourhood which, at its northern end, is more rural than urban.

Belmont

A maze of narrow lanes flanking the eastern side of the Queen's Park Savannah, **BELMONT** is one of the most densely populated areas of Port of Spain. It was the city's first suburb, settled in the early nineteenth century by Africans who had escaped slavery on other Caribbean islands. After emancipation, they were joined by freed slaves from Trinidad and a number of peoples from West Africa. In 1868, the tribal chieftain of the **Rada community** – a religious group from the French protectorate of Dahomey – bought land in the area to establish a settlement. Representatives from the Mandingo, Ibo, Yoruba and Krumen tribes also came to live here, and Belmont became an established African settlement. The community was well organized and close-knit, ensuring the survival of African traditions such as the Orisha religion (see p.268), whose feasts and festivities are still practised here.

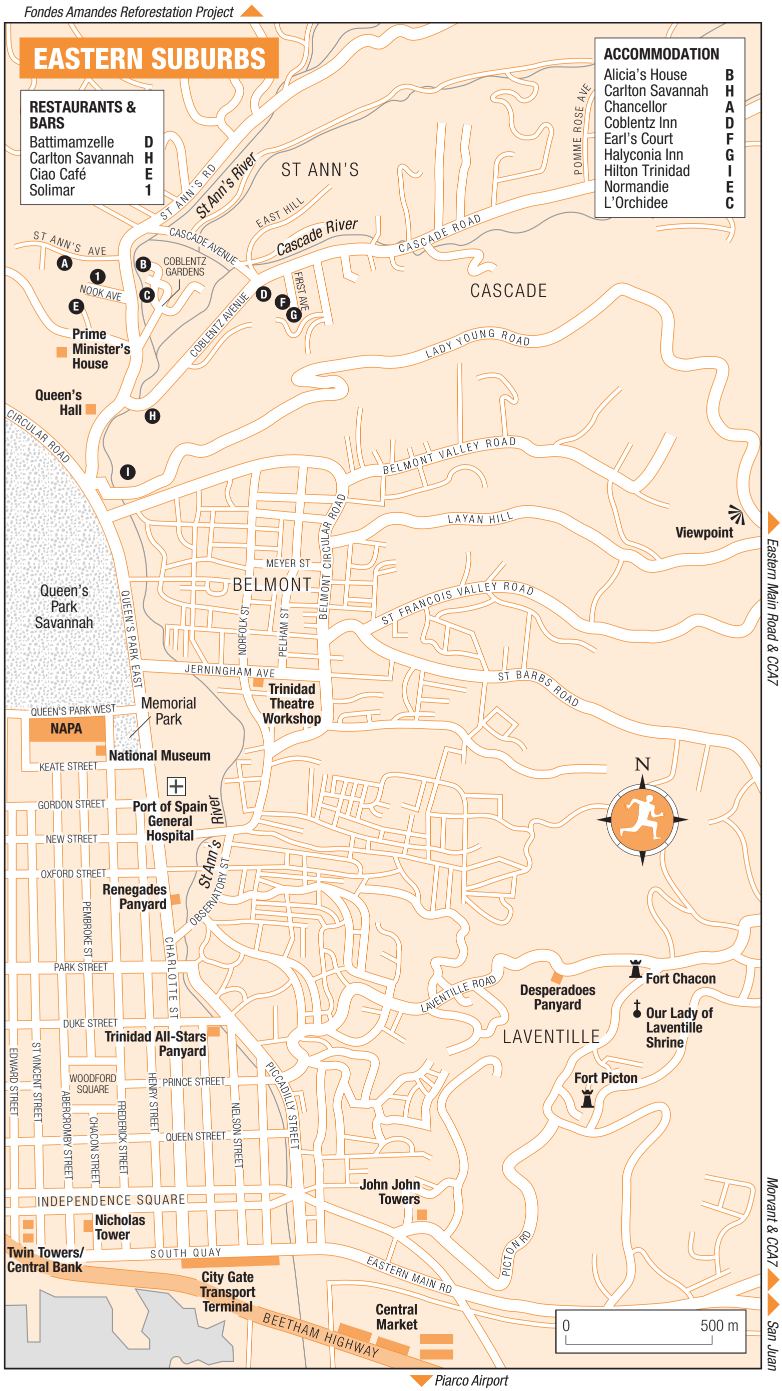
You won't see much evidence of Rada in the area as a casual visitor, however, and the main reason to come here is to check out many fine examples of ornate gingerbread architecture or pay a visit to the **Trinidad Theatre Workshop**, housed in a pretty little fretworked building at 23 Jerningham Ave (☎624 8502). Founded in 1959 by poet, playwright and Nobel Laureate **Derek Walcott**, it established a theatrical tradition in Trinidad, made acting a recognized profession and launched the careers of many of the Caribbean's most famous thesps. The TTW enjoyed its heyday in the 1960s and 70s, and though Walcott's 1992 Nobel Prize for Literature inspired a regeneration of sorts, it's a quiet place these days, with its small performance space in use for occasional workshops and productions.

At Carnival time, the community centre just in from the Savannah on Jerningham Avenue is also worth a visit, as it hosts what's known as **Five Nights**, a brilliant reggae jam staged by the Twelve Tribes Rasta sect and a great antidote to the frenetic menu of soca, soca, soca.

Laventille

LAVENTILLE's maze of houses – some made from salvaged boards and galvanized roofing, others veritable palaces – sit on steep and twisting streets in defiance of gravity. The suburb was established in the 1840s when freed slaves settled on the hillside above the city's eastern edge – right "on the eyebrow of the enemy", as the

EASTERN SUBURBS


Fondes Amandes Reforestation Project
ST ANN'S RD
St Ann's River
ST ANN'S
EAST HILL
Cascade River
CASCADE ROAD
POMME ROSE AVE
ST ANN'S AVE
CASCADE AVENUE
COBLENTZ GARDENS
NOOK AVE
FIRST AVE
CASCADE
COBLENTZ AVENUE
Prime Minister's House
LADY YOUNG ROAD
Queen's Hall
CIRCULAR ROAD
BELMONT VALLEY ROAD
LAYAN HILL
Viewpoint
BELMONT CIRCULAR ROAD
MEYER ST
BELMONT
Queen's Park Savannah
QUEEN'S PARK EAST
NORFOLK ST
PELHAM ST
ST FRANCOIS VALLEY ROAD
JERNINGHAM AVE
Trinidad Theatre Workshop
ST BARBS ROAD
QUEEN'S PARK WEST
Memorial Park
NAPA
National Museum
KEATE STREET
N
GORDON STREET
Port of Spain General Hospital
River
NEW STREET
St Ann's
OXFORD STREET
OBSERVATORY ST
Renegades Panyard
PEMBROKE ST
PARK STREET
CHARLOTTE ST
LAVENTILLE ROAD
Desperadoes Panyard
Fort Chacon
Our Lady of Laventille Shrine
LAVENTILLE
DUKE STREET
Trinidad All-Stars Panyard
Fort Picton
EDWARD STREET
ST VINCENT STREET
WOODFORD SQUARE
ABERCROMBY STREET
CHACON STREET
FREDERICK STREET
HENRY STREET
PRINCE STREET
NELSON STREET
PICCADILLY STREET
QUEEN STREET
John John Towers
INDEPENDENCE SQUARE
Nicholas Tower
Twin Towers/ Central Bank
SOUTH QUAY
City Gate Transport Terminal
EASTERN MAIN RD
PICTON RD
BEETHAM HIGHWAY
Central Market
0
500 m
Piarco Airport
Eastern Main Road & CCAT
Morvant & CCAT
San Juan
A
B
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D
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I
1

RESTAURANTS & BARS	
Battimamzelle	D
Carlton Savannah	H
Ciao Café	E
Solimar	1

ACCOMMODATION	
Alicia's House	B
Carlton Savannah	H
Chancellor	A
Coblentz Inn	D
Earl's Court	F
Halyconia Inn	G
Hilton Trinidad	I
Normandie	E
L'Orchidee	C

Trinidadian novelist Earl Lovelace rather beautifully put it – and it remains a volatile place, said to be a stronghold of the Jamaat-al-Muslimeen (see p.74) and forever used as a political football by politicians keen to swing the African vote. Despite the negatives, Laventille has an undeniable confidence and verve, and it was within its winding streets that the **steel pan** was born. Celebrated by the Nobel laureate **Derek Walcott** in his poem *The Hills of Laventille*, the area has spawned many a great pan player and calypsonian, and is home to the **WITCO Desperadoes panyard**, just off the main Laventille Road. Established by Rudolph Charles in the 1940s, Desperadoes (then known as the Dead End Kids) are the oldest steel band in Trinidad, with many Panorama wins to their credit and a crowd of die-hard supporters who make performances an exciting prospect. However, the uneasy prospect of venturing into Laventille to hear practice sessions has led Despers to set up a temporary base overlooking the Savannah in the run-up to Carnival (see below).

Laventille Hill is crowned by **Our Lady of Laventille Shrine**, an imposing landmark that's visible from all over Port of Spain. Atop the 16m belfry of this white stone church stands a statue of the Virgin Mary, a gift from France in 1876 and still a pilgrimage site on the feast of the Assumption. Look closely and you can also pick out the Martello Tower at **Fort Picton**, just up from the church, built by the notorious British governor of the same name in the late 1790s, and now an outpost of the Trinidad Defence Force.

Though Laventille proper isn't a place for sightseeing, it is worth making the trek out to its outskirts, where the rows of old warehouses between the highway and the Eastern Main Road hold the massive complex of the **Angostura distillers**, producers of T&T's most popular rums, from Black Label to Old Oak and the premium Royal Oak and 1919 brands. Tours (Mon–Fri 9.30am and 1.30pm; 2hr;

Panyards

The best way to hear **pan** is live, in the open air – there is nothing as romantic as listening to its rich chiming harmonies drifting on the wind on a warm starry night. Throughout the year Port of Spain hosts events in which pan figures prominently, but in the run-up to Carnival, it's well worth taking a tour around the city's panyards, where the musicians gather most nights to practise their compositions for the Panorama competition. Visitors are welcome (crowds get quite sizeable as the big day approaches), and there's always a bar and somewhere to sit and take in the music – though bear in mind that you may hear a section of a song being practised over and over again rather than the whole thing. Panyards are also open at other times, though the scene isn't as animated. If you don't have a car or want to get a better insight into pan, one of the best ways to visit the yards is to take an evening **tour** with Gunda Harewood of Island Experiences (☎625 2410, Ⓦwww.islandexperiencestrinidad.com). The better-known **panyards** in Port of Spain are listed below; Phase II, Invaders, Silver Stars, Renegades and All Stars usually draw the biggest crowds, and Desperadoes have a pre-Carnival base opposite the Savannah adjacent to the *Apsara/Tamnak Thai* restaurants. For full listings of the country's pan bands, visit Ⓦwww.pantrinbago.co.tt.

Desperadoes Upper Laventille Rd, East Dry River, Laventille

Invaders 147 Tragarete Rd, opposite the Queen's Park Oval, Woodbrook

Phase II Pan Groove 13 Hamilton St, off Damian St, Woodbrook

Renegades 138 Charlotte St, Port of Spain

Silver Stars 56 Tragarete Rd, Newtown

Starlift 187C Tragarete Rd, Woodbrook

Trinidad All Stars 46 Duke St, Port of Spain

Woodbrook Modernaires Corner of Tragarete Rd and French St, Woodbrook

The Angostura saga

Being producer of T&T's favourite rum ensures that the **Angostura Distillers** (Ⓦ www.angostura.com) holds a special place in the hearts of local limers. Trinbagonians stick by Angostura with a nationalistic zeal, declaring its rum the best in the world and adding a dash of its **aromatic bitters** to everything from drinks to marinades, soups and puddings, as well as swearing by the mixture as a cure for almost any ailment.

Angostura was founded by **J.G.B. Siegert**, a German surgeon who left his homeland to join Simon Bolivar in the fight for Venezuelan independence from Spain. Alarmed at the debilitating stomach ailments which plagued Bolivar's troops, Siegert began experimenting with South American herbs and spices to concoct a remedy. He succeeded in 1824, creating the secret blend of botanicals that still make up the bitters today, and named his tonic after the Venezuelan town where Bolivar's movement was based.

Popularized by sailors who brought wind of its curative powers to England, the mixture was first exported six years later, and demand increased rapidly. Production was shifted to the more economically and politically stable Trinidad, and the George Street plant soon dominated the small town of Port of Spain. After Siegert died in 1870, the company was taken over by his sons. The founder's great grandson Robert Siegert, who took the helm in 1928, steered Angostura to greater heights, establishing the Caribbean's most modern distillery in 1949 and exporting Trinidad's beloved product all over the world.

As the company became more valuable, so foreign investors began to make increasingly generous takeover bids. By now, however, Angostura had become so entrenched in the psyche (and the economy) of Trinidad that the government stepped in, taking control of the company in the mid-1950s and returning it to Siegert Holdings, who offered cut-price shares to employees and affirmed Angostura as the "people's distiller".

Despite its bitters being voted the world's worst-displayed product by the British Advertising Council in 1995 (the packaging has changed little since 1824), Angostura has gone from strength to strength, buying out other local distillers, establishing a shiny new factory on the outskirts of Laventille and winning scores of awards; no less than seven monarchs, including Britain's Queen Elizabeth, have given bitters the royal stamp.

The company continues to take its traditions seriously, and the **secret recipe** for bitters remains cloaked in mystery. No one knows the entire recipe for Angostura bitters; instead, five individuals memorize a specific section of some ingredients, and these five are not allowed to enter the blending room (or even travel) together. After mixing the ingredients, each sends their part of the blend down a chute to the same percolating container that's been used since the company began trading in Trinidad, where the herbs and spices are "shampooed" in alcohol for twenty hours before fermentation and bottling.

US$10) of Angostura's rum factory cover the history of the company as well as a look around the bottling plant, distillery and bitters production area; you'll also see the 700-plus specimens of the Barcant Butterfly Collection, and get to sample the rums. Tours are only available to groups of ten or more; call ⓣ 623 1841 to see if it's possible to fit in with existing bookings. To **get there** from Port of Spain, take Lady Young Road to the Morvant junction and turn right at the traffic lights onto the Eastern Main Road.

St Ann's and Cascade

From the northeast corner of the Queen's Park Savannah, St Ann's Road heads past the **Queen's Hall**, a favourite venue for pre-Carnival calypso revues, drama, dance and fashion shows, into the leafy suburb of **ST ANN'S**. A residential area that melts almost seamlessly into the equally well-to-do **CASCADE** district to the east, St Ann's offers little in the way of sightseeing, though it is well worth heading along St Ann's Road, then Fondes Amandes Road, to reach the brilliant **Fondes Amandes Community Reforestation Project** (daily, no set hours; ☎689 7794 or 624 1341, Ⓦwww.facrp.org) which, as the name suggests, has been doing marvellous work replanting the denuded St Ann's hillsides and creating "fire paths" to stop seasonal bush fires in their tracks. Some 7000 trees have already been planted, and the project's land is laced with easy hiking trails that afford lovely views of the city. **Guided walks** (US$10–30) are available, during which you can learn more about the project's work, and relax afterwards with a natural juice made with fruits from the trees which now flourish on the hillside.

Maraval and Paramin

Some 5km north of central Port of Spain via Circular Road from the northwest corner of the Savannah, **MARAVAL** lies at the base of the Northern Range, surrounded by lush green hills. What was once a small village on the outskirts of the capital has now mushroomed into an upmarket residential suburb, with a sprinkling of hotels and guesthouses. The main thoroughfare (and the route to Maracas beach), Saddle Road is lined with shops and houses; just up from the junction with Long Circular Road, the **Shoppes of Maraval** and adjacent Royal Palm Plaza include a HiLo supermarket, several fast-food restaurants, a pool bar and a nightclub, making this a focal point in a town with no real centre. About 3km further north, the cream-and-maroon Neo-Romanesque **Maraval-Paramin Roman Catholic Church**, built in 1879 and enlarged in 1934, dominates the hillside on the right-hand side of Saddle Road, and is notable more for its picturesque location than a spectacular interior. Continuing north, you'll pass the expansive, well-kept **St Andrew's Golf Course** before the road takes a scenic route over the Northern Range, providing good views of the forested slopes of the Maraval Valley and eventually arriving – after many steep inclines and hairpin bends – at Maracas on the north coast.

If you turn left at the church onto Morne Coco Road and walk for about 200m, you'll arrive at the place where jeeps leave for the charming hillside village of **PARAMIN**, the so-called "herb basket of Trinidad". Farmers here produce "Paramin seasoning", whose ingredients include French and Spanish thyme, mint and spring onions (here known as chives). The local population are descended from French Creoles who came to Trinidad in the colonial era, as well as Venezuelans who arrived in the nineteenth century to plant cocoa, and the close-knit but friendly community maintains many of its traditions, most famously in its **parang** bands, who travel from house to house during the Christmas season, singing nativity songs in a mix of French and Spanish. The Monday before Christmas, Paramin hosts a **parang festival** at the soccer field at the lower end of town. Meanwhile, on the afternoon of Carnival Monday at around 5pm, the town is overtaken with **blue devils** – traditional Carnival characters impersonating imps from hell – dancing in the streets and attempting to drench onlookers with blue paint – the most anarchic display of Blue Devil mas you'll see anywhere in the country.

There are few specific sights, but the precipitous terraces of seasoning plants and the green-swathed hills are superbly scenic and often swathed in mist; on clear days, there are many lovely views down to the sea, while the clear, cool air is marvellously fragrant. At the lower end of town, on a terrace overlooking the Maraval Valley, **Our Lady of Guadalupe Church** looks more like a conservatory than a place of worship, with its green roof and plant-lined windows; each year on the Sunday before Carnival, a Mass is conducted here entirely in the French Creole patois that’s still spoken by Paramin elders. Caribbean Discovery Tours (Ⓣ624 7281) offers 4WD **tours** of Paramin which include a visit to a seasoning farm and a stop-off at the gorgeous **North Deck**, a viewing platform overlooking Saut D’Eau island on the north coast. For a more local flavour, Portia Brown (Ⓣ629 0441 or 779 4848), driver of the Paramin jeep “General” and a resident of the area, conducts informal excursions; prices are negotiable.

Eating

Port of Spain’s **restaurant** scene has boomed in recent years, nowhere more so than along **Ariapita Avenue** in Woodbrook, which has everything from high-class establishments serving fancy nouvelle Caribbean cuisine to more casual places cooking up excellent local food and takeaway diners offering good budget eats. The capital’s other top restaurants can be found in the hotels, notably in **St Ann’s** and **Cascade**, and in the residential streets of **Newtown**. There are also several busy places ranged around MovieTowne’s Fiesta Plaza, all of which have tables in the central courtyard as well as inside. If you have your own car, it’s also well

Street food and takeaway

With its great tradition of street food, Port of Spain offers plenty of tantalizing alternatives to a sit-down meal. **Doubles** are sold from streetside carts from as early as 6am, and many of the most popular vendors run out by lunchtime. Everyone has their personal favourite, but you’ll always see long queues at the George and George’s X stalls on Carlos Street in Woodbrook (outside *Brooklyn Bar* and *Coco Lounge*, respectively); you can also find several vendors outside the main entrance to Long Circular Mall, and along Western Main Road in St James. The latter also holds the lion’s share of the many stalls that set up as the sun goes down, cooking up roti, aloo pies, corn soup, geera pork, pholouri and the like, as well as delicious home-made ice cream. There are also a row of stalls on paved area of the **Queen’s Park Savannah** opposite the National Academy for the Performing Arts, and along **Independence Square**; at the latter, one not to miss is the brilliant ital (vegetarian) roti stall which sets up on the South Quay side of the square on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays, and sells gorgeous rotis as well as macaroni/potato pie and accompanying veggie delights. Gyros (flatbread wraps filled with chicken, lamb, shrimp, fish or falafel) are also found at all the city’s street food spots in ever-increasing numbers, while the adventurous might want to sample the local oysters slurped down with peppery tomato sauce from stalls around the Savannah on Queen’s Mark West and Maraval Road.

For something more substantial, there are legions of hole-in-the-wall places offering inexpensive local lunches, while the **food courts** in all of the shopping malls are also good for a quick bite of something Chinese, Creole or Indian for around TT$35.

There are also **fast-food** outlets all over town, from excellent local outfits such as *Royal Castle* or *Joe’s Pizza* to *KFC and Papa John’s*. There’s a concentration of outlets along Independence Square, and you’ll find *Dominos* pizza and *Subway* sandwiches along Ariapita Avenue, both adjacent to *CroBar* on the corner of Carlos Street. There are also a host of options (*Subway*, *Burger King*, *Long John Silver’s* seafood) in the MovieTowne complex, off the highway in Woodbrook opposite the Stadium, and in the Shoppes of Maraval complex at the start of Saddle Road in Maraval.

worth driving out to **Chaguaramas** (see p.111), which has a string of great places to eat at right on the water. Note that many of the more fancy restaurants offer prix-fixe lunch menus or buffets, which can work out to be surprisingly good deals for the quality and quantity of food.

If you fancy a quick coffee, smoothie or a sandwich, you'll find branches of the *Rituals* **coffee shop** all over town, including Maraval Road in St Clair and all of the malls; all have wi-fi. For **ice cream**, look out for outlets (such as *Paradis de la Crème* and *Mangoes*; see below) selling the delicious Paolo's Gelato, ice cream and sorbet made with no added fat or colourings and in flavours such as soursop, Portugal and Baileys. There are also *Haagen Dazs* outlets at Ellerslie Plaza in Maraval, and West Mall.

Note also that many restaurants also double up as good places for a **drink**, and we've highlighted the best options in the reviews below.

Downtown and the Savannah

Unless otherwise stated, the places listed here appear on the Central Port of Spain map, p.63.

Apsara 13 Queen's Park East ⓣ623 7659, ⓦwww.apsara.co.tt. Traditional Northern Indian cuisine, from tandooris to rogan jhosh, served in very plush a/c surroundings. Lots of vegetarian choices and delicious desserts, but prices are high. Daily 11am–3pm & 6–11pm, closed Sun evening.

Breakfast Shed Wrightson Rd, opposite Independence Square. Established in 1936 to provide workers' meals and still churning out hearty, inexpensive fare, this breezy open-sided "shed" with communal tables overlooking the Gulf of Paria is filled with outlets selling excellent local food, from buljol or smoked herring breakfasts to fish broth, stewed chicken and all the usual Trini sides. Look around before you buy – some cooks are better than others, so head for the ones with the queues; there's also a stall selling fresh juice. Daily 6.30am–4pm.

Chaud 2 Queen's Park West ⓣ623 0375, ⓦwww.chaudkm.com. The newest venture of one of Trinidad's most celebrated chefs, Khalid Mohammed, this super-swanky place in a refurbished old building offers Savannah views and some seriously good (and seriously expensive) cooking, with starters such as shrimp, octopus and conch souse or guava scallops and main courses of tamarind-glazed pork with a Madeira sauce or snapper with mussels, squid and tomato choka. Daily 11am–3pm & 6–10.30pm.

D Bocas 15 Chacon St, just up from Independence Square ⓣ627 3474, ⓦwww.dbocas.com. Reliable Creole lunches served up in an a/c cafeteria in the heart of downtown, from the usual fried or stewed fish with all the accompaniments to chicken, pork and goat. Also a popular spot for a drink and a dance, with regular live acts and drink promotions, though visitors are a definite rarity. Mon–Fri 10.30am till late.

Hardline Vegetarian 34 Park St ⓣ623 9560. Adorned with piles of fresh fruit and vegetables, this justifiably popular lunchtime diner serves up delicious, healthy vegetarian meals – steamed veg, soya stew, marinated dumplings – as well as fruit salads. The main reason for a visit, however, is for the cheap and refreshing blended fruit juices. Mon–Fri 6am–6pm.

Living Water 109 Frederick St ⓣ623 4677. The a/c canteen of this Catholic charitable organization offers delicious, inexpensive meals, and channels its profits into its good works. The menu changes daily: breakfasts range from buljol and bake to eggs, while lunches always include meat, fish and vegetarian options (including veggy gravy); Trini-style cakes and pastries are also on offer. Mon–Fri 7am until 2–3pm.

Mangoes 40 Gallus St ⓣ628 0054 (see Western Suburbs map, p.87); and 64 Independence Square ⓣ626 2646. Busy locations on the Avenue and the heart of downtown, with a/c dining rooms and a huge choice of dishes, from Chinese to Creole and Indian, as well as a large range of salads and grills – served cafeteria-style from behind a glass counter. Both are also good for an evening drink, with the Independence branch offering a lovely balcony overlooking the square. Mon–Thurs & Sat 6am–10pm, Fri 6am–midnight, Sun 6am–7pm.

Mother Nature Corner of St Vincent and Park St Standard. Inexpensive vegetarian meals and salads, plus smoothies and juices freshly made in front of you using a variety of fruits and energy supplements. The buffet-style a/c café is small with limited seating. Mon–Fri 5am–4.30pm, Sat 8am–4pm.

Tamnak Thai 13 Queen's Park East ⓣ625 0647, ⓦwww.tamnakthai.co.tt. Elegantly decorated in rich Thai style, this smart restaurant has indoor and outdoor sections, the latter ringed by a carp-filled pond and lush foliage. Prepared by a native Thai chef, the food is excellent: green curry, stir-fries and various rice dishes all feature on the menu. Good wine list and excellent service. Daily 11am–11pm, closed Sat evening.

Waterfront *Hyatt Regency* hotel 1 Wrightson Rd ⓣ821 6550. A lovely setting overlooking the waters of the Gulf of Paria, this is the only restaurant in Port of Spain that makes the most of the town's oceanside setting. The cooking is pretty good, too, with an international menu featuring all the usual suspects, from fresh fish to steaks; regular theme nights see menus based on Asian, Caribbean, Argentinean and Indian cuisine, and the Sunday brunch is excellent, with a lavish array of dishes. The adjacent bar is a cool spot for a cocktail, too. Daily 7am–10.30pm.

Woodbrook and around

The places listed here appear on the Western suburbs map, p.80.

Angelo's 38 Ariapita Ave ⓣ628 5551. Upmarket dining in an elegantly decorated gingerbread house. The menu runs the full gamut of Italian specialities and includes pastas and plenty of fish and meat dishes, but as prices are heavy on the purse-strings, you might want to go for the prix-fixe lunch menu. Mon–Sat 11.30am–2.30pm & 6.30–10.30pm.

Arabian Gyros 43 Tragarete Rd ⓣ628 9207. Good option for a lunch or early dinner, serving inexpensive Middle Eastern food, from falafel sandwiches (TT$15) to wraps and kebabs, plus sides such as hummus, kibbys and baba ganoush. Eat in or takeaway. Mon–Fri 8am–7pm.

Dopson's 4 Maraval Rd. This tiny takeaway sells some of the city's best roti: beautifully stretchy dhalpuri skins (or buss-up-shut) and excellent fillings, from shrimp to conch or goat, plus the usual veg, chicken or beef and a mean curry mango. Expect queues. Lunch only. Closed Sun.

Eagle's Ariapita Ave, corner of Fitt St. Some of the best Chinese food in town, with a huge menu covering all the regulars. Steamed prawn won tons and tofu in black-bean sauce are highlights, and there's good dim sum on Sun (10.30am–3pm). Mon–Sat 11am–10.30pm, Sun 10.30am–10pm.

El Pecos 84 Ariapita Ave ⓣ622 9713 and 68 Ariapita Ave ⓣ628 9908. Basic, inexpensive Creole food: veg rice, lentil peas, macaroni pie, plus jerk and rotisserie chicken, fried fish and salads. You serve yourself and pay according to weight. Both branches have a few tables. Mon–Sat 11am–10pm.

Frankie's 68 Ariapita Ave ⓣ622 6609. Low-key diner that makes a good quick stop. Breakfast might be sada roti with all the trimmings or buljol with bake, while the Creole and Indian lunch and dinner offerings change daily, from roti to stewed/curried chicken or beef, as well as juicy grilled meat and fish from the barbecue outside and salad sides. The a/c canteen offers a nice respite from the heat; there are also a few tables under shade outside. Daily 7.30am–10.30pm.

Hakka 4 Taylor St ⓣ221 0080. Chinese cuisine with an Indian flavour, served up in a handsome a/c dining room decked out in subtle shades of orange and brown. Menu highlights include rich dhal soup, spicy Chilli Fish and Konjee crispy chicken, as well as the delicious desserts such as date won tons with ice cream. Not the cheapest in town, but takeaway is more affordable. Mon–Sat 11am–11pm.

Hanami Sushi Shop 7 MovieTowne Blvd, Audrey Jeffers Hwy ⓣ623 5370. Indoor a/c dining room appealingly decorated in Japanese style, tatami-matted booths and all. Good service, and a tasty range of salads and sushi (including California rolls) as well as tempura platters and beef and chicken mains. Tues–Sat 11am–11pm, Sun 5–11pm.

Irie Bites 71 Ariapita Ave ⓣ622 7364. Jamaican jerk shack which does some of the tastiest and best-value meals in the city. Nicely seasoned and cooked over pimento wood, the generous portions of jerk chicken, pork and fish are served with various side dishes such as plantain, fries or mixed vegetables and accompanied with a selection of excellent sauces. Ackee and saltfish available on Saturdays. Delivery available. Mon–Thurs 11am–9pm, Fri & Sat 11am–10pm.

Mélange 40 Ariapita Ave ⓣ628 8687, ⓦwww.melangetrinidad.com. Genteel, colonial-style decor and sophisticated international/local cuisine; great soups (onion, clam chowder) and plenty of meat dishes – cashew-encrusted lamb, rabbit in burgundy sauce – as well as fish, from seafood crepes to mussels Provencal. Mon–Fri 11am–2.30pm, Tues–Sat 7–10.30pm.

More Sushi 23 O'Connor St, corner of Ariapita Ave ⓣ622 8466, ⓦwww.morevino.com. Presided over by a Japanese chef, the marble-topped counter inside this excellent wine bar offers the best sushi and sashimi in Port of Spain, reasonably priced and always super-fresh. All the usual suspects plus unusual creations featuring local herbs, as well as edamame, miso soup, shrimp tempura and Japanese curry. The regular house menu, from tapas platters to pasta, risottos, honey-roast duck or chicken with bacon, is equally good. Closed Sun.

New Earth Organic 80 Roberts St ⓣ379 6860. Tiny little organic store and café offering fresh produce and cooked lunches, though availability depends on what's in stock; look out also for baked goods such as banana or spelt bread. Always delicious and a great place to meet people. Lunch only, closed Sun.

Paradis de la Crème MovieTowne Complex ⓣ624 6378. A/c coffee shop and patisserie facing the stadium to the side of the cinema, offering delicious and indulgent cakes and desserts, all made on the premises from fresh ingredients and as such not the cheapest dessert option in town. The cheesecake is great, as are the savoury snacks – soup, spinach quiche, curry crab or mushroom pasties – and the coffee is lovely. Breakfast is available: omelettes, scrambled eggs and pancakes with syrup (TT$36). Daily 9am–11pm.

Patraj 161 Tragarete Rd ⓣ221 9592. Hailed by many Trinis as the capital's best roti shop, and now moved one building down from its original location. Consistently high-quality food, from the delicious morning sada roti with tomato choka to the usual array of skins and fillings for lunch and early dinner. Mon–Sat 8am–5pm.

Ruby Tuesday MovieTowne Complex ⓣ624 6566. Trini franchise of an American chain, this ever-popular place offers icy a/c and a decent international-style menu: burgers, plenty of seafood (herb-crusted tilapia or peanut-glazed salmon), as well as pastas, ribs, steaks and an excellent salad bar. Daily 11am–11pm.

Shanghai Experience MovieTowne Complex ⓣ624 9227. Expansive and expensive Chinese restaurant above the cinema offering all the staple starters and main courses. The lunch buffet (Mon–Wed 11.30am–2pm) offers ten main courses and represents a pretty good deal, as does the evening dinner buffet on a Wed (7–9.30pm), with sixteen dishes including fish, shrimp, squid and lobster. There's also dim sum on a Sunday. Daily 11am–10.30pm.

Sweet Lime Ariapita Ave, corner of French St ⓣ624 4048, ⓦwww.sweetlime.co.tt. With outdoor tables positioned overlooking the Avenue, this is a great spot for people-watching over a meal from a varied, inexpensive menu: good seafood and cutters, starters, salads, ribs, pepper shrimp, steaks, mouth-watering rotisserie chicken, burgers (including veggie) and several vegetarian options such as stuffed peppers and chow mein for mains. It's also a great liming spot, with wi-fi, a daily happy hour (5–7pm), regular karaoke and backgammon tournaments, and live music at weekends. Mon–Thurs & Sun 11.30am–midnight, open 24hrs Fri & Sat.

Trader Jack's Fiesta Courtyard, MovieTowne, Audrey Jeffers Hwy ⓣ222 2571. Though its garish murals, plastic tree house and centrepiece pond waterfalls lend it the air of an American theme park, this supremely upbeat place serves up mid-priced grilled chicken, fish and meat alongside colourful cocktails to an enthusiastic local crowd. Mon–Thurs & Sun 11.30am–midnight, Fri & Sat 11.30am–1am.

Veni Mange 67 Ariapita Ave ⓣ624 4597, ⓦwww.venimange.com. Set on the first floor of a pretty, greenery-swathed building and with an interior bedecked with artwork from all over the region, *Veni* is a Port of Spain institution, ably presided over by its genial owners and as good a bet as a liming spot as it is a place to eat. The mid-priced food is a happy blend of local staples with an international twist, such as steamed grouper with a shrimp stuffing and coconut tomato sauce or grilled chicken with pineapple, raisin and tamarind salsa. There's always a good veggie option, from aubergine, tomato and cheese pie to lentil, mushroom and cashew loaf, as well as hearty salads and tasty puddings. Lunch Mon–Fri, dinner Wed & Fri only.

Woodford Café Fiesta Courtyard, MovieTowne, Audrey Jeffers Hwy ⓣ627 2233. Reasonably priced if sometimes underspiced Creole food, from accra fritters, soups (fish broth, corn, sancoche, cowheel, veg), baked chicken, honey or jerked ribs, plus "Coco Payol" pasta (with shrimp, chicken and sausage) and "Papa Chunks" or "Tiney Winey" steaks. Also a popular liming spot, with two-for-one drinks on Thurs (8–10pm), a busy Friday after-work lime and occasional live music. Daily 11am–2am.

Zanzibar Fiesta Courtyard, MovieTowne, Audrey Jeffers Hwy ⓣ627 0752. This could be a chain restaurant in any American town, but it nonetheless cooks up some reasonable food, from Porterhouse steaks with mushrooms to teriyaki salmon and roasted rack of lamb, as well as salads and burgers. The bar is a pleasant place for a drink, with big screens showing sports events. Mon–Thurs & Sun 11.30am–midnight, Fri & Sat 11.30am–1am.

St James

The places listed here appear on the Western Suburbs map, p.80.

Chinkey's Nite-Bite Western Main Rd, opposite *Smokey and Bunty* (see p.100). Rasta-run food stall serving a loyal clientele with delicious veggie concoctions, fried fish, shark 'n' bake, smoked herring and saltfish sandwiches, and fresh juices. A great pre- or post-clubbing option. Tues–Sun 7pm–late.

Ole Créole 127 Western Main Rd ⓣ759 9800. Offering really good Tobago-style cooking, with a couple of tables in a handsome old wooden building. The buffet-style food, from stewed chicken to sautéed tuna, is served with all the usual sides – callaloo, macaroni pie, veg rice, pigeon peas – and you pay by weight. Daily 7am–5pm.

Newtown and St Clair

Unless otherwise stated, the places listed here appear on the Central Port of Spain map, p.63.

Il Colosseo 16 Rust St, St Clair (see Western Suburbs map.p.80) ⓣ628 1494. Fancy Italian restaurant popular with expense account execs and serving authentic food cooked by a genuine Italian chef. Good bread, worthy starters (including beef carpaccio excellent pasta, tasty seafood and meat choices (try the veal marsala) and some decent wines. There's a good lunch buffet and Sunday brunch, too. Mon–Fri 11.30am–2.30pm & 6.30–10.30pm, Sat 6.30–10.30pm, Sun 9.30am–2.30pm.

Jaffa The Pavilion, Queen's Park Oval, Tragarete Rd (see Western Suburbs map.p.80) ⓣ622 6825. Excellent fine dining place in the city's cricket ground, popular with Port of Spain's businessmen and best experienced by way of the extensive lunchtime buffet (around TT$150). A la carte dishes range from Thai green shrimp curry to seared lamb loin with mint pesto and potato cake, plus really good steaks from the grill. Mon–Fri 11.45am–2.30pm, Sat 6.30pm–late.

Jenny's on the Boulevard 6 Cipriani Blvd ⓣ625 1807. Popular bar-restaurant in the basement of an attractive sky-blue gingerbread house serving reliable if slightly overpriced Chinese food, steaks and other American-style dishes. The basement pub is a lively place for a drink on Fri and Sat evenings. Mon–Thurs 11am–10pm, Fri & Sat 11am–11pm.

Pollo Tropical Picton St, corner of Queen's Park West. Fast-food diner in a handy location right on the Savannah, offering decent flame-grilled chicken, shrimp and steaks with Latino/Caribbean-style sides such as fried cassava and plantain, black beans and Spanish rice.

Tiki Village *Kapok Hotel*, 16–18 Cotton Hill ⓣ622 5765. One of the better hotel restaurants, with lovely views over the Queen's Park Savannah and a relaxing ambience provided by a bubbling spring and rattan furniture. The Chinese/Polynesian cuisine is excellent; go for the dim sum on Sun or the weekday buffet lunches, which are better value than the à la carte choices. Mon–Fri 6.30am–10.15pm, Sat & Sun 7am–10.15pm.

Trotter's Corner of Maraval and Sweet Briar rds, St Clair ⓣ628 6461, ⓦwww.trotters.net. Cavernous sports bar and restaurant that's a popular place to watch big sports events on the big screen. The menu ranges from calamari to crab won ton starters to excellent burgers, salads, pizza (including a tandoori chicken version), burritos, pasta and grilled meats and fish; they also do a "traditional British" Sunday lunch, plus fish and chips and bangers and mash. Portions are huge and prices match the pockets of the fairly affluent crowd. Mon–Thurs & Sun 10am–midnight, Fri & Sat 10am–2am.

The Verandah 10 Rust St, St Clair (see Western Suburbs map.p.80) ⓣ622 6287. Exclusive, classy restaurant in a coolly converted gingerbread house decorated with plants and local art, with a pretty open-air patio for evening dining, which is available only two days of the week. Fabulous "freestyle Caribbean" cooking: lots of fresh herbs, seafood, garden vegetables and attention to detail, with menu highlights such as seafood in tamarind sauce and pecan-crusted chicken. Mon–Fri 11.30am–2pm, Thurs & Sat also 7–10pm.

St Ann's and Cascade

The places listed here appear on the Eastern Suburbs map, p.87.

Battimamzelle *Coblentz Inn*, 44 Coblentz Ave, Cascade ⓣ621 0591. Upmarket Caribbean cuisine with an international flavour, served rather fussily on a pretty outside terrace or an air-conditioned dining room. Dishes include steamed coconut snapper with plantain and cassava crisps, pomegranate-glazed duck or pork loin with pimento butter and curried aubergine. Mon–Sat 11am–3pm & 6–11pm.

Carlton Savannah Coblentz Ave, St Ann's ⓣ621 5000, ⓦwww.thecarltonsavannah.com. If you feel like a break from local cuisine, the two in-hotel restaurants here offer excellent international cooking. *Relish*, in the lobby, is a casual place offering a TT$160 two-course lunch special (Thai fishcakes and rack of lamb, perhaps) as well as salads, burgers and meze platters, while the fine-dining *Ca-Sa* offers more sophisticated and expensive fare with a local flavour, from steaks to seafood, on a regularly changing menu. It's also good for a quiet drink, with the linen-draped private cabanas at poolside *Waterbaby* (closes 10pm) perfect for a spot of canoodling, and a good selection of regional rums at the indoor *Indaba*.

Ciao Café *Normandie Hotel*, 10 Nook Ave, St Ann's ⓣ624 1181. A great place for a quiet dinner, with tables outdoors on a fairy-lit terrace. Good wine, attentive service and a reliable menu of Caribbean and Italian food, from juicy coconut shrimp to chicken with mushrooms and Marsala or almond-crusted snapper. Daily 11.30am–3pm & 6–10.30pm.

Solimar 6 Nook Ave, St Ann's ⓣ624 6267, ⓦwww.solimarcuisine.com. This expensive and exclusive restaurant offers a pleasant setting on a semi-open terrace and some really good cooking, from hot and cold tapas to soak up the excellent wines (try the tuna ceviche or chorizo with potatoes and dry sherry), as well as succulent main courses such as bouillabaisse, grilled fish with pesto and pork with foie gras and roast garlic mash. Mon–Sat 5pm–11pm.

Maraval

The places listed here appear on the Western Suburbs map, p.80.

Adam's Bagels 15a Saddle Rd ⓣ622 2435. Busy breakfast, lunch or early dinner spot, with a deli selling all kinds of goodies, from fresh bread and cakes to tabbouleh, baba ganoush and delicious pastelles. There are also tables in the a/c rear section where you can order excellent bagels, sandwiches, soups, salads (try the limey pakchoi with cucumber and onion), kebabs, burgers and a lovely Thai chicken wrap. Delivery available. Mon–Sat 7am–6pm.

Creole Kitchen 22 Boissiere Village No.1, opposite Ellerslie Plaza. Not much to look at from the outside, with an a/c dining room, this place offers reliable Creole food, with breakfast and lunch served daily; look out for the soup and pelau on Sat, and the Sun lunch special, usually baked chicken with all the trimmings. Daily 8am–5pm.

Drinking, nightlife and entertainment

Trinidadians wouldn't dream of restricting their partying to Carnival time – anything from a public holiday to the end of a workday is deemed a worthy cause to celebrate. Port of Spain is an excellent place to enjoy a night on the town at any time of the year, and you can find something going on every night of the week.

Most bars and clubs come alive after 10pm and are busiest from Thursday to Saturday, with bars often deluged on a Friday for the customary "after-work lime". Precise **opening hours** are hard to state, though. Most bars are open "till", meaning that they close when the last customers leave, while clubs shut their doors sometime around daybreak. If a place advertises its opening hours as "anytime, anyday", it means that the owners have a 24-hour licence and open and close when they feel like it. The daily newspapers have movie listings and details of upcoming parties, theatre productions and special events in their "**What's on**" sections; it's also a good idea to listen to the radio and keep your eye out for posters slapped up on lampposts around town.

Finally, a number of **casinos** (known as "members clubs" to contend with local gambling laws) operate around town, particularly in Woodbrook, most with roulette, baccarat, black jack and stud poker on offer alongside the slots, and you'll see lines of cars parked outside them most nights. If you fancy some gambling, try Ma Pau, Ariapita Avenue, at French Street (daily 11am–4am; ⓣ627 6214) or Winner's Club, 42a Ariapita Ave (daily 10am–6am; ⓣ628 6333).

Bars

Port of Spain's western suburbs are packed with **bars**, from intimate places with funky modernist decor and a good wine list to pumping outdoor spaces. Most host

Carnival online

There's a huge amount of Carnival info online, and if you're arriving in T&T shortly before the main event. the sites below will give you all you need to get you in the mood. The website of the National Carnival Commission (ⓦwww.ncctt.org) is somewhat clunky and slow to be updated, though does have an official calendar of Carnival events.

Trinidad Carnival Diary ⓦsaucytrini.blogspot.com. Brilliant blog by a self-confessed "Carnival obsessive", updated daily and with reviews and discussions of mas bands, fetes and all things Carnival, including essential advice pages such as "Carnival tights – to wear or not to wear". Links to all the bands and relevant websites, too.

Trini Scene ⓦwww.triniscene.com. Much visited for its shots of patrons at parties around T&T, but also good for listings and live streaming of fetes around Carnival time.

Carnival Junction ⓦwww.carnivaljunction.com. A lifesaver if you're scrabbling to find a costume and play mas last-minute, with a section advertising costumes for sale and swap, as well as Carnival accommodation and some fete info. The site ⓦfineahban.com is an alternative for swaps and sales.

Trini Jungle Juice ⓦwww.trinijunglejuice.com. Fete pics and events info, and reviews of events from the "Party Critics" who make it their business to participate in a "feteathon" – basically, attending them all.

busy after-work limes on a Friday afternoon, with drinks promotions, and many have a happy hour and a DJ playing music at the weekends. At the other end of the scale, there are **rum shops** on practically every corner in Port of Spain, especially in the market area east of Charlotte Street. These tend to be small, basic joints frequented by middle-aged men, and are not particularly tourist-friendly; better to head for places on Western Main Road in St James such as the *Universal Lounge* (opposite *Smokey and Bunty*), or in Woodbrook to *Alaska*, 73 Ariapita Ave, or *Brooklyn Bar* on Carlos Street at the corner of Roberts Street.

Lastly if you fancy a drink in more relaxed surroundings, head out to Chaguaramas (see p.111), where there are a string of lovely places by the sea. A fabulous alternative to the bar scene are the regular events staged at **Alice Yard**, 80 Roberts St in Woodbrook (ⓦaliceyard.blogspot.com), from live music to film screenings, art exhibitions and dance performances.

Unless otherwise stated, the places here are marked on the Western Suburbs map, p.80.

40/40 Ariapita Ave, corner of Luis St. A/c pool club with several tables, some serious players among its regulars and sports events shown on flat-screen TVs. Bar snacks available, too.

All out Sports Bar and Grill The Pavilion, Queen's Park Oval. Rather macho hangout, popular for catching big games on the large-screen TVs and as a post-match haunt. English beers, and good food such as wings, calamari and the like. Tues–Sat 11am–late.

Arthur's Place Lucknow St, St James. Laidback jazz bar, popular with a mature crowd and offering live music on Wed and Fri as well as the odd bout of karaoke. Tues–Sat noon–late.

Aura 51 Cipriani Blvd (see Central Port of Spain map, p.63) ⓦwww.auratt.com. Tucked underneath *51°* nightclub, with tables out on a deck and inside, this classy place is popular with a moneyed set, who come to see and be seen, either on the terrace or with a bottle of high-end spirits in the VIP booths. Good cocktails, daily happy hour (5–7pm) and drinks promotions, and excellent food too, from sushi to short-rib meatloaf.

Coco Lounge 35 Carlos St, corner of Ariapita Ave ⓦwww.cocoloungett.com. The polar opposite of *CroBar* over the road, drawing a richer crowd of pretty young things who come to lime on the raised balcony or dance in the indoor a/c lounge. Wed sees live music on the deck, Thursdays is Latin night, with dance classes 8–9pm, Saturday is party night. Good light meals and shareable platters, too. Cover charge Thurs–Sat. Closed Mon.

Carnival calendar

Bear in mind that Carnival and its associated events shift around each year depending on the days of the main parade, which takes place on the last Monday and Tuesday before Lent; **upcoming Carnival dates** are as follows: Feb 15 & 16, 2011, March 7 & 8, 2011, February 20 & 21, 2012, February 11 & 12, 2013, March 3 & 4, 2014, February 16 & 17, 2015.

The tourist board website Ⓦ www.gotrinidadandtobago.com has a fairly up-to-date **calendar of events**; the list below represents the main events, which appear in rough order of occurrence; Carnival season traditionally begins on January 1.

Opening of Calypso Tents Calypsonians battle it out in the "tents" – regular buildings, these days – for a place in the Calypso Monarch finals. The best-known venues are Calypso Revue, SWWTU Hall, Wrightson Rd; Kaiso House, Strand Cinema, Tragarete Rd, at Dundonald St; Klassic Russo, Kavemar Pub, 130 Henry St.

Panorama Steel pan bands play their composition of choice on the Savannah stage as they compete for the prestigious first prize. The preliminary judging night is very well attended, held a couple of weeks before Carnival; the finals take place on Carnival Saturday.

Junior Calypso Competition Children compose and sing hard-hitting calypsos, full of satire, humour and social commentary.

National Chutney Soca Monarch The best of Trinidad's popular chutney performers compete for the annual crown.

Kiddies' Carnival The children's costumes and characters rival those of the adults. There are three parades: the Red Cross Children's Carnival, held at the Savannah ten days before Carnival; the St James Kiddies' Carnival on the following day; and the Junior Parade of the Bands from South Quay to the Queen's Park Savannah on Carnival Saturday.

Traditional/Individual Mas Held on the Sunday preceding Dimanche Gras, and the last Friday before Carnival Monday, with parades throughout the day and evening from in South Quay to Adam Smith Square on Ariapita Avenue; this is the best place to see traditional Carnival characters such as Blue Devils, Dame Lorraine, Burrokeets, sailors and firemen. There are also traditional mas parades in St James (outside the Amphitheatre, Western Main Rd) check the press for dates and timings.

International Soca Monarch The cream of the region's soca stars sing for the prestigious International Soca Monarch and Groovy Soca Monarch titles to a huge and packed crowd.

Dimanche Gras The finals for the King and Queen of Carnival and the Calypso Monarch, staged at the Queen's Park Savannah on the Sunday before the main parades. Calypsonians go all-out with theatrical presentations of their compositions, while the sheer size of the King and Queen costumes, and the skill, sequins and special effects expended makes an amazing spectacle.

Jouvert (pronounced "joovay", from the French "Jour Ouvert", the break of day) Marking the beginning of the festivities, Jouvert is "dirty mas": raw, earthy and energetic. Wear as little as possible (no jewellery) and expect to be covered in mud. See p.83 for details of organized Jouvert bands.

Carnival Monday Parade of the Bands Parades through the streets of Port of Spain from noon till dusk; note that not everyone wears their costumes on this day.

Carnival Tuesday Parade of the Bands The full display of all the costumes. The route is the same as Carnival Monday; the best place to view the bands is from the stands at the Queen's Park Savannah (for which you pay an entry fee) or at the bleachers set up at the judging points at South Quay, Victoria Square on Park Street and Adam Smith Square on Ariapita Ave. Starts 7am.

Ash Wednesday The huge cooldown parties usually held at Maracas and Manzanilla have been scaled down in recent years; check the press for details of what's on, or follow the crowds and escape to Tobago.

▲ *Smokey and Bunty*, St James

CroBar Corner of Ariapita Ave and Carlos St. Reliably busy open-air drinking spot that attracts a party-hard young crowd and plenty of guys on the make. Friendly enough, though, and with pumping soca, dancehall, hip-hop and R&B until the last patron leaves. Good option for an after-work lime on a Fri.

Drink 63 Rosalino St, corner of Roberts and Warren sts, Woodbrook. Cosy and friendly wine bar, with regular events such as the Friday "Soul What", with a DJ playing neo-soul, acid jazz, afro beat and soulful house. Great wine list, excellent cocktails and good food, too. Wed & Thurs 4pm–midnight, Fri 4pm–2am, Say 6pm–2am, Sun 4pm–midnight.

Earth Cipriani Blvd, next to Mario's. Cool, unpretentious little bar just up from the junction with Tragarete Rd, with seating inside and by the side of the boulevard. Good cutters (bar snacks) and decent Creole lunches, plus regular karaoke nights and occasional live bands. Popular Friday night after-work lime, too.
Mon–Sat 11am–late.

La Casa de Ibiza 163 Tragarete Rd. A short walk from the Avenue, just up from the Oval, this newish a/c place has something different every night: poetry, spoken word and unplugged musicians on Acoustic Mondays, jazz and fusion on Tuesdays, electronica on Weds and "Live Sessions" on Thursdays in which the best of the local bands take to the stage. Friday is Latin night, and there's a daily happy hour (5–7pm).

La Habana 61 Ariapita Ave. Newly refurbished with a hot-pink paint job, this tiny little bar (formerly *Squeeze*) opens onto the street, and the friendly mixed crowd spills out over the pavement and onto the tarmac. DJs play Latin, soca and techno at the weekends, and there's regular drinks promotions and special events. Mon–Sat 4pm–late.

J. Malone's Fiesta Courtyard, MovieTowne Complex, Audrey Jeffers Hwy. Heavily styled Irish bar complete with the requisite knick-knacks bedecking the walls – though the draught Guinness is of the canned variety. Plenty of Irish whiskeys are available, though, and it's a popular spot on Thurs with Irish expats, and with a mature mixed/local crowd at the weekends. Food – including beef and Guinness Irish strew – is available, and there's a big celebration each St Patrick's Day. Sun–Thurs 11am–11pm; Fri & Sat 11am–2am.

Mas Camp Pub French St, at Ariapita Ave, Woodbrook ☎ 627 4042. Now renamed as the *Nu Pub*, but still known to most by its former moniker, this long-standing Port of Spain favourite has pool tables and slot machines in a back room, and an a/c main area that's popular with an older local crowd, who come to dance to oldies on Sun. There's usually a calypso show on Wed evenings, and other themed nights, from Latin to karaoke, throughout the week – to see what's on, pick up a schedule of events at the entrance, or check the board outside. Cover charge varies. Daily 11am–late.

Feting Carnival

With Christmas over and done with, the New Year in Trinidad means one thing for dedicated Carnivalists: **fetes**. Staged by everyone from the local water company to the T&T army, these huge outdoor parties get everyone in the Carnival mood and set you up for a great experience on the road. There are hundreds to choose from, all with a very different flavour and character, ranging from the more raw events such as WASA or Brass to laidback cooler parties where you bring your own drinks and top-end all-inclusive parties staged in gorgeous rural surroundings, with premium drinks and food covered by the (extremely high) ticket price. The roster of events changes each year, with new ones popping up and established parties fading away; check the web and events listings in the daily newspapers, listen to the radio and keep an eye out for billboards around Port of Spain. All of the fetes mix music from DJs with live performances from the cream of local and regional soca acts and, increasingly, the current hot DJs from Jamaica.

In recent years, **wet fetes** have become increasingly popular, with the crowd cooled down by jets of water from huge hoses – stay at the back if you want to keep dry. **Cooler fetes** mean most people arrive primed with a cooler stocked full of drinks and ice, but there's always a bar too. Note also that not all of the fetes are night-time affairs: many of the more upmarket **all-inclusive** events take place in the afternoon and run on into the evening (giving you time to hit a night-time fete too, if you have the stamina). Finally it's worth bearing in mind the **location** of your party; if it's in Chaguaramas, which is connected to Port of Spain by a road with a single lane of traffic each way, you'll probably be stuck in a jam for hours – plan to start your outward journey early, and leave before the final act if you don't want a painfully slow return.

What to wear and take

As feting is a frenetic and extremely sweaty business, it pays to **dress appropriately**. Unless you want your toes mashed to a pulp, leave the heels and sandals at home and wear comfortable sneakers or covered shoes. For women, a pretty top (usually a vest – you'll get very hot when dancing) with hot shorts or jeans is *de rigueur*, while most men wear jeans or long pants and a shirt or T-shirt. A rag to wave and wipe your

More Vino 23 O'Connor St, corner of Ariapita Ave Ⓣ622 8466, Ⓦwww.morevino.com. Popular with a mixed crowd of young and old, this is a lovely spot for a glass of wine or a cocktail, either on the decked area outside or the a/c indoor bar. Great service, excellent food (see p.93), regular drinks promotions and good music that's kept at a conversations-friendly level. Mon–Wed 10am–midnight, Thurs–Sat 10am–1am.

Nex Dor 58a Ariapita Ave. Tiny, friendly little neighbourhood bar, with a small outdoor area. A good spot for a quiet drink, with occasional live music and special events. Daily 11am–late.

Sandbar Ariapita Ave, corner of Ana St. Laidback little bar with a few tables inside and on the veranda overlooking the Avenue. Karaoke on Tuesdays and regular deals on shots and beers. Tues–Thurs 6–11pm, Fri 4pm–2am, Sat 6pm–2am.

Shakers on the Avenue 43a Ariapita Ave. Set in a cute little gingerbread house, with tables in the garden area, on the veranda and in an a/c area inside, this is a busy place for a drink, though the 1980s piped music can make for a rather odd aural accompaniment. Regular live music with a rock flavour, bar snacks to soak up the booze and daily drinks promotions. Mon–Sat 11am–1am, Sun 5pm–1am.

Smokey and Bunty 97 Western Main Rd, at Dengue St, St James. This Port of Spain institution is a popular late liming spot, drawing a very mixed crowd – young, old, arty, gay and straight, plus an ever-present coterie of St James headcases who entertain the crowd with feats of bottle-balancing and other escapades. The clientele spills onto the pavement (where there are tables), the music is loud and a good-natured atmosphere prevails. Mon–Thurs 11pm–3am, Fri–Sun 10pm–6am.

Wave Sports Bar Royal Palm Plaza, Saddle Rd, Maraval. Roomy sports bar with multiple pool tables (and a serious crowd of aficionados wielding the cues) as well as dartboards, sports on the TVs and lots of tables for a sociable drink.

brow is also essential – you'll often find promotional rags stamped with logos given away on the night. For wet fetes, most women wear shorts, but anything that isn't too heavy and dries quickly should be fine. High-end all-inclusive fetes, however, are a very different kettle of fish, with patrons dressing to impress and heels aplenty for the women.

In terms of **security**, pickpocketing has become the bane of feting, both at the more hardcore events and at shows such as Soca Monarch – it's common for thieves to work in teams, with one person dancing with the unsuspecting victim while another slides a hand into a pocket to remove cash or valuables. To beat the thieves, carry cash in your bra or shoes, and hold mobile phones in your hand; a small zip-closure bag tucked under your arm can also work. Finally, expensive jewellery or watches are also best left at your hotel.

As most evening fetes don't get going until around 11pm, and the best acts perform in the early hours, don't arrive too early.

Tickets and prices

Many of the websites listed in the box on p.97 carry fete schedules, with details of dates, prices and ticket outlets. You can buy **tickets** from music stores such as Cleves and Crosby's (see p.103) as well as selected outlets in Port of Spain's malls; listen to the radio or check online for details. If you don't buy ahead, you can invariably get a ticket outside the venue from a tout (or scalper, as they're known here); most ask a lot more than face value, but you can usually negotiate a deal, especially if you're buying a few tickets. Trinidad Fete Tickets (ⓦtrinidadfetetickets.com) is a useful service that will secure fete tickets for you. Fete prices range enormously, and seem to rise alarmingly each year; in 2007, the average for the large, more hardcore fetes was TT$200, while the high-end all-inclusives cost up to TT$900 and average at around TT$700. Many of the mid-range fetes sell both general admission and VIP tickets; the latter usually include some drinks and allow you to get close to the stage without mixing in the melee of the main crowd – worth considering if you're new to feting or want slightly superior facilities.

Clubs

Port of Spain's **club** scene has gone through a few changes in recent years, with a couple of flashy new options opening up alongside several equally low-key, unpretentious places to have a drink and a dance.

A sign posted at the entrance to most clubs gives the establishment's **dress code**. Although foreigners can usually get away with more than locals, bear in mind that men may be turned away if wearing sneakers, shorts or hats, while women should wear heels or strappy sandals (beach flip-flops are not deemed appropriate). Cover charges hover around TT$60, or up to $130 if drinks are included.

51° 51 Cipriani Blvd, Newtown ⓣ627 0051, ⓦwww.51degrees.biz. One of Trinidad's most popular clubs, attracting a mixed, uptownish party crowd and with a wide music policy, mostly dancehall, R&B and hip-hop, with some dance and "alternative" thrown in too. To be assured entry at weekends, arrive before 10pm, or call/email a guest list in advance. Thurs is karaoke followed by party tunes, and the busiest nights are Fri and Sat.

Alchemy 8–10 Tragarete Rd, Newtown ⓣ624 1757, ⓦwww.alchemynightlife.com. Set in the former Strand cinema, and with three levels – bar, dance-floor and nice rooftop terrace – this pretender to *Zen's* crown is popular with a young crowd, with the "Forbidden Friday" night seeing the largest crowd, with free drinks until midnight and a playlist of dancehall, hip-hop, pop, techno and soca. Thurs–Sat.

Katalyst 1 Gray St, corner of Rust St, Newtown ⓣ222 3632. Mixed-age, fairly well-heeled crowd and a lovely venue, with all sorts of nooks and crannies and an open-air section. The residential setting means the music is kept rather low, however.

Kavemar Pub 130 Henry St, Port of Spain. Home to the Klassic Ruso calypso tent at Carnival, and usually has something going on – a good spot for a low-key lime, popular with an older crowd and with the occasional live concert too, but not a place that sees many visitors.

Sabor Latino Shoppes of Maraval, Saddle Rd, Maraval Ⓦwww.saborlatinolive.com. Brilliant little club (still known by its old name, *Attic*), friendly and unpretentious with lots of dark corners in which to dance – though it can be a bit of a pick-up joint. Latin nights on Thurs and Sat (with salsa classes 5.30–7.45pm) draw a twirling Venezuelan-dominated salsa crowd. Women are free on Tues before 11pm (and get free drinks); other main nights are Fri and Sat, when the compact dancefloor is heaving until the early hours to a more soca- and dancehall-dominated DJ set, while Sunday is reggae night.

Sky 43 Ariapita Ave, Woodbrook. Overlooking the Avenue opposite the RBTT bank, this semi-open-air gay club offers fabulous views across the city, a friendly, mostly male crowd and a soca, dancehall and R&B playlist. Great option for women sick of getting hit on, and a good link if you want to find out more about Port of Spain's thriving gay scene. Cover is around TT$50. Fri & Sat 10pm–late.

Zen 9–11 Keate St, Newtown Ⓣ625 9936, Ⓦzen.tt. Set over three floors in a lavishly redecorated former cinema, with a rooftop lounge, a "VIP" area and a main dancefloor for the masses, this is the island's top club, popular with everyone from barely legal teens to 50-something die-hard partiers. Drinks are expensive, so the all-inclusive RAH Wednesday is ever-popular, with "alternative" music alongside the usual tunes, as are the Saturday party night and Sunday retro affair. Women sometimes get in free before 11.30pm, and it's a good idea to arrive before 10pm to avoid snaking queues. Closed Mon & Tues.

Theatre and cinema

When Port of Spain is not preoccupied with the continuous live entertainment of Carnival season, **theatre** becomes a popular diversion, with a hugely varied set of productions staged at Queen's Hall, alongside the odd play at the Trinidad Theatre Workshop or Little Carib Theatre. As well as staging their brilliant annual Carnival show, rapso band 3-Canal (Ⓦwww.3canal.com) sometimes produce a summer show; check their website for details.

Port of Spain's **cinema** scene hinges around the ten screens at the fiercely air-conditioned **MovieTowne** on Audrey Jeffers Highway opposite the Hasley Crawford Stadium (Ⓣ627 8277, Ⓦwww.movietowne.com). The only old-timer left is the **Globe** (Ⓣ623 1063), on the corner of St Vincent and Park streets in the downtown area, which shows double bills of the latest American blockbusters; be ready for loud and often witty commentary from the audience.

For less mainstream cinema, look out for the Trinidad & Tobago Film Festival (see p.37) or the European Film Festival, held in October; both are based at MovieTowne. The **Studio Film Club** stages free screenings of esoteric movies, from documentaries to world cinema, which take place on Thursdays at 8.15pm at the CCA7 arts facility within the Angostura complex to the east of town (see p.88); visit Ⓦstudiofilmclub.blogspot.com for details of what's on.

Theatres

Central Bank Auditorium Twin Towers financial complex, Independence Square South Ⓣ623 0845. Entrance through Eric Williams Plaza. The most comfortable and high-tech theatre in Port of Spain features productions by well-known Trinidad theatre companies – usually comedies.

Little Carib White St, at Roberts, Woodbrook Ⓣ622 4644. Opened in 1948 and closed for restoration at the time of writing, this intimate and historic theatre concentrates on plays and shows highlighting local talent and culture.

Queen's Hall 1–3 St Ann's Rd, St Ann's Ⓣ624 1284, Ⓦwww.queenshalltt.com. Opposite the *Hilton Trinidad*, this is the largest theatre in Trinidad, featuring drama, dance, music and fashion shows, as well as calypso concerts in Carnival season; it's also the regular venue for 3-Canal's renowned pre-Carnival show, definitely one to look out for.

Trinidad Theatre Workshop 23 Jerningham Ave Ⓣ624 8502. A tiny and intimate performance space.

Under the Trees *Normandie Hotel*, 10 Nook Ave, St Ann's Ⓣ624 1181. Atmospheric evening performances under the stars in the grounds of the *Normandie* hotel, showcasing local artists doing everything from stand-up comedy to local plays.

Shopping

Downtown Port of Spain's main shopping area is around **Frederick Street**; the malls **West Mall** in Westmoorings, **Ellerslie Plaza** in Maraval and **Long Circular** in St James offer more upmarket stores, though less local colour. There are **supermarkets** at West Mall, Long Circular Mall, Saddle Road in Maraval, just off St Ann's Road in Cascade and French Street in Woodbrook. For gourmet goodies, head to Malabar Farms, 115 Long Circular Rd, which has a big range of quality meat and fish as well as deli items and fresh-baked French bread.

Many Trinidadians have clothes made to measure, and there's an abundance of **textile** shops downtown along Queen and Frederick streets. You'll find many international chains in the malls, but for locally made **clothes**, try Radical Designs in Excellent City Centre Mall, Frederick Street, West Mall and Long Circular Mall; the **Z Meiling** store, *Kapok* hotel, 16–18 Cotton Hill, St Clair, sells classic pieces by Meiling, Trinidad's top designer.

For **Carnival supplies**, try Samaroo's, 11–13 Abercromby St, or Tulip, Ariapita Avenue (at the corner of Ana St), which have feathers, sequins, glue guns and the like to make your own costume or adapt the one you buy.

There are several **galleries** around town, such as 101 Art Gallery, corner of Jamaica Boulevard and St Vincent Avenue in Federation Park (Ⓣ628 4081, Ⓦwww.101artgallery.com), which usually has some great canvases by well-known local artists on the walls, as does Yasmin's, 26 Taylor St, Woodbrook (Ⓣ628 4186, Ⓦyartgallery.com).

By far the best **book store** in T&T, the marvellous Reader's Bookshop, 1 Middle St just off Long Circular Road, has an ever-expanding range of Caribbean titles, plus poetry, classics, bestsellers, non-fiction and children's books. Metropolitan Book Suppliers, downstairs at Capital Plaza (formerly Colsort Mall), 11–13 Frederick St, has an excellent range on T&T's history and culture, and the ubiquitous Khan's are in West Mall, Long Circular Mall and Ellerslie Plaza.

Crafts can be found at street stalls and, at higher prices (but often better quality), in the malls. **Rainy Days**, 60 Ellerslie Plaza, Maraval, has everything from miniature wooden rum shops to hand-painted postcard-sized watercolours; Soma at the *Normandie* hotel in St Ann's (see p.69) carry a similar selection. For handmade leather sandals and Rastafarian goods, try the stalls along Frederick Street. Beautiful natural jewellery, made from local seeds, pods and nuts, is available at the Fondes Amandes Reforestation Project in St Ann's (see p.90).

For **soca CDs**, head to **Cleve's One Stop Music Shop**, at the back of a small mall at 58 Frederick St, and **Crosby's**, 54 Western Main Rd, St James.

Listings

Airlines Air Canada Ⓣ669 4065; American Airlines Ⓣ821 6000; British Airways Ⓣ624 2487; Caribbean Airlines Ⓣ625 7200; LIAT Ⓣ627 6274.

Airport 24hr information line Ⓣ669 4866, Ⓦwww.piarcoairport.com.

Banks Numerous branches (all with ATMs) on Independence Square downtown; Republic Bank also has branches in West Mall and Long Circular Mall, and Ariapita Ave (corner of Murray St) in Woodbrook. Scotiabank is at Ellerslie Plaza in Maraval and Western Main Rd (corner of Bengal St) in St James. You'll get a better rate of exchange at FX Trader, with locations at Excellent Stores, on the corner of Frederick St and Independence Square (Mon–Thurs 9am–5pm, Fri 9am–6pm, Sat 8.30am–2.30pm); Excellent Stores on the corner of Frederick and Park streets (Mon–Thurs 8am–5pm, Fri 9am–5.30pm, Sat 9am–2pm); next to Marios in City Gate bus station (Mon–Fri 8am–5pm, Sat 8am–2pm).

Car rental Auto Rentals, Lady Young Rd, Morvant Ⓣ675 7368; Convenient, Tropical Marine, Western

Main Rd, Chaguaramas ⓣ634 4017; Econo Cars, 191–193 Western Main Rd, Cocorite ⓣ622 8072.

Embassies and high commissions British High Commission, 19 St Clair Ave, St Clair (Mon–Fri 7.30–11.30am, ⓣ350 0444, ⓦukintt.fco.gov.uk/en); Canadian High Commission, 3–3A Sweet Briar Rd, St Clair (Mon–Thurs 7.30am–noon & 12.30–4pm, Fri 7.30am–1pm, ⓣ622 6232, ⓦTrinidadandTobago.gc.ca); US Embassy, 15 Queen's Park West (Mon–Fri 7.30–11am, ⓣ622 6371, ⓦtrinidad.usembassy.gov).

Hospital The main public hospital is Port of Spain General, 169 Charlotte St (ⓣ623 2951–52); waiting times can be long and facilities basic. The private St Clair Medical Centre, 18 Elizabeth St, St Clair (ⓣ628 1451 or 8615) is a good private hospital with an A&E department. For an ambulance, dial 811.

Internet Many cafés and all branches of *Rituals* coffee shops have free wi-fi. Net cafés include Xyber Xynergy, upstairs at Town Centre Mall, Frederick St, just north of Independence Square (Mon–Fri 8am–5pm, Fri 8am–6pm, Sat 8am–3pm). In Newton, try L&C, 26 Maraval Rd (Mon–Fri 7am–7pm Sat 9am–5pm); in Woodbrook, there's Internet Café Inside, 83 Roberts St, corner of Rosalino (Mon–Fri 9am–7pm, Sat 11am–7pm).

Laundry Ashleigh Phillip's Coin Laundry, 10 Western Main Rd, St James ⓣ628 2268.

Pharmacies SuperPharm (ⓣ633 1663), in the car park of the West Mall complex, Westmoorings, has a 24hr drive through; the branch in Royal Palm Plaza, Maraval (ⓣ622 6025), is open Mon–Sat 7.30am–11pm, Sun 9am–9pm.

Police Report crimes at the Central Police Station, St Vincent St, at Hart ⓣ625 1261 or 2684. In emergency, dial ⓣ999.

Post office TT Post has several branches, including: 23 Chacon St (Mon–Fri 7am–5pm, Sat 9am–2pm); City Gate, South Quay (Mon–Fri 7am–6pm, Sat 8am–1pm); 177 Tragarete Rd, next to Roxy roundabout, Woodbrook (Mon–Fri 7am–5pm, Sat 8am–noon).

Swimming pool The *Hilton Trinidad* (see p.68) now allows non-guests to swim for a daily fee of TT$80.

Travel agents Haygem, 55 Edward St ⓣ625 5328.

West to Chaguaramas

From Port of Spain, the Audrey Jeffers Highway heads east along the coast, past the turn-off to the residential suburbs of Diego Martin, Petit Valley and Westmoorings, the latter home to the plush **West Mall** shopping centre. Just past here, the road narrows and swings through upscale **Glencoe**, where there's a mini shopping mall with a supermarket, fast food outlets and an RBTT bank. Beyond here, things get more ramshackle, with the odd rum shop and rickety wooden stall selling fruit and vegetables, and some lovely vistas out over the Gulf of Paria.

The biggest community hereabouts is the rather run-down **Carenage**, so named because ships were taken here to be careened by Spanish colonists. After the British took the island in 1797, Carenage reverted to a fishing village and sank into a century-and-a-half-long torpor, but its character changed drastically with the arrival of the Americans in 1941, when Chaguaramas was turned into a US military base and all the western tip's residents were forcibly relocated to here. The village soon acquired a seedy reputation as a place where American soldiers went to have fun and find local women, and there are still a couple of flophouses around. Today, it retains a somewhat salty air and a dodgy reputation.

Past Carenage, the coast road trundles along parallel to the sea, its twists and turns revealing lovely vistas out to the Bocas and back to Port of Spain, before entering **Chaguaramas**, Port of Spain's playground, with its waterside restaurants, hiking trails and string of marinas where yachts hole up during the hurricane season or dry-dock to do maintenance work. The area still has a very military flavour, with training camps for the army and coastguard in Chaguaramas town; beyond the dilapidated *Cove* resort, the road is blocked to civilian traffic and the peninsula is the exclusive preserve of the military, with the Trinidad and Tobago Regiment headquarters at Teteron Bay and the Coast Guard at nearby Staubles Bay.

There is regular **public transport** along the Western Main Road, with PTSC **buses** and **maxis** linking Port of Spain and *The Cove*, stopping at all points in between. To explore the Chaguaramas National Park, however, you will either need to **rent a car** or, for the more energetic, a **bicycle**. Maxis continue to run throughout the night between Port of Spain and the nightclubs in Chaguaramas, even if they are much fewer and farther between and fill up quickly when available.

Chaguaramas

A few hundred metres west from Carenage, past the large white bauxite loading plant that juts into the sea, the Western Main Road enters **CHAGUARAMAS** (pronounced "sha-ger-*rah*-mus"). Home to red howler and capuchin monkeys, armadillos, ocelots and anteaters, much of this land has remained virtually untouched, with shallow beaches around the coast and miles of virgin rainforest in its mountainous interior, much of which is now a protected **national park**. Leisure development has, for the most part, been sensitive and unobtrusive, though the hulking hangars left by the Americans aren't particularly pretty, and the string of marinas obscure most of the southern coastline. The open stretches that remain are popular spots for locals to swim or go fishing, but the water isn't that clean thanks to the heavy traffic of container ships in the Gulf of Paria and the yachts in the marinas. Better swimming can be had on the north coast at **Macqueripe Beach**, a delightful cove that's easily accessible by road provided that you have your own transport.

Come to Chaguaramas on a weekend and you'll see people liming on the beaches, paddling Williams Bay in kayaks, cycling and jogging along the quiet roads and hiking in the forests, while at night, a more glamorous crowd comes in from Port of Spain to frequent the restaurants or attend one of the regular parties staged in the area's open-air venues.

Some history

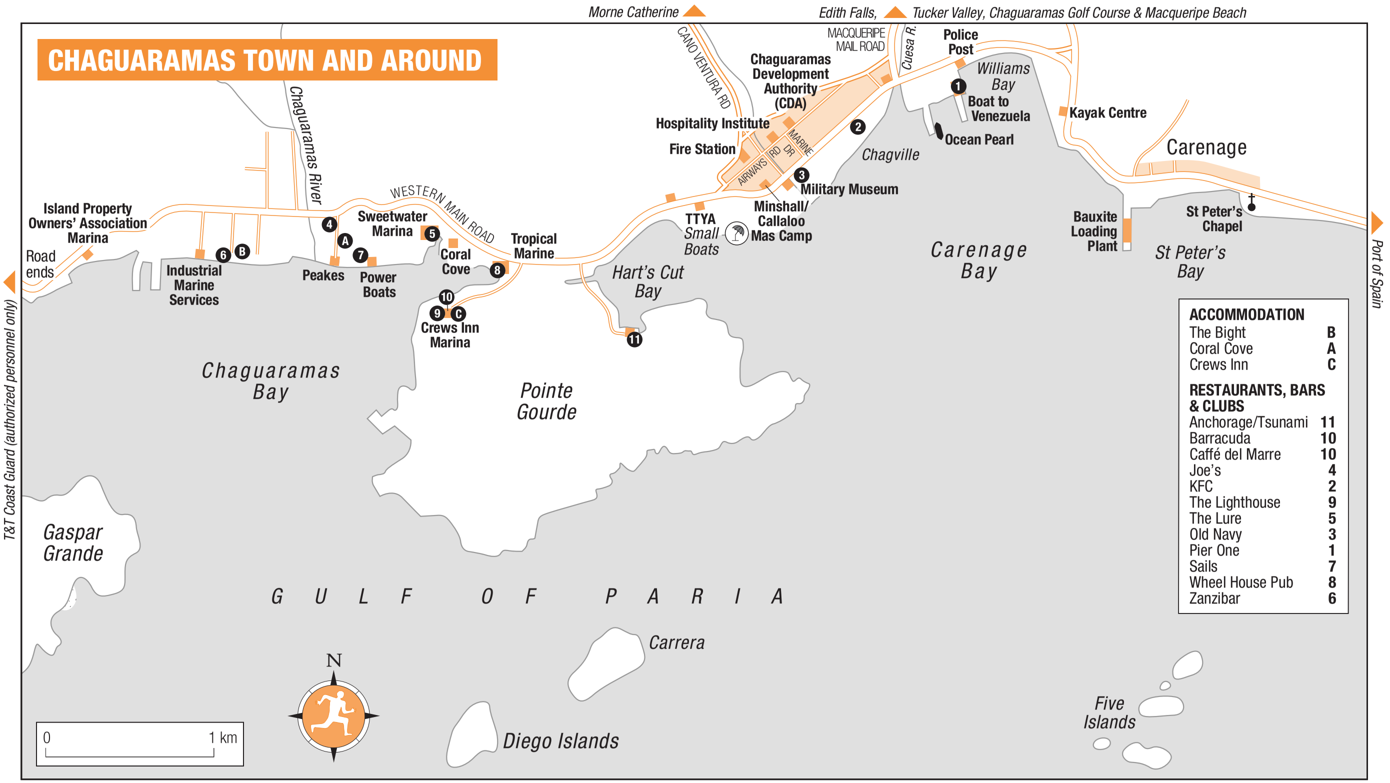
The name Chaguaramas, derived from the Amerindian word for the palms that once lined this coast, is the only remnant of the area's indigenous population. The protected natural harbours here provided the **Spanish** with a hiding place for their ships when the **British** invaded in 1797, though when it became clear that defeat was inevitable, the ships were scuttled. The harbour at Williams Bay was also the reason the **US military** wanted Chaguaramas as its Caribbean base during World War II, and they leased the peninsula from the British in 1940 in return for fifty used destroyers.

Though initially greeted with a warm welcome, the American soldiers quickly became unpopular. Many Trinidadians resented the US occupation of the beaches and countryside that were most easily accessible from the capital, not to mention the social effect of having so many young American men living in the region. The GIs outnumbered the local men, who couldn't compete with the Americans' ostentatious wealth, and the resentment this generated was immortalized by Lord Invader in his famous calypso *Working for the Yankee Dollar*:

Rum and Coca-Cola, Go down to Point Cumana,
Both mother and daughter, Working for the Yankee Dollar

(Ironically, a bastardized version of the song took saw Andrews Sisters spend ten weeks at the top of the US billboard charts in 1945, much to the disgust of Invader, who successfully sued for copyright infringement.) The situation in Chaguaramas was not improved by the Americans' attitude towards **race**. A 1945 edition of *Life* magazine reported that "US soldiers confused by the mix of colour lines would keep a brown paper bag at the doorway to their parties. Anyone whose skin was lighter than the bag was considered white (and allowed entry)."

CHAGUARAMAS TOWN AND AROUND



ACCOMMODATION	
The Bight	B
Coral Cove	A
Crews Inn	C
RESTAURANTS, BARS & CLUBS	
Anchorage/Tsunami	11
Barracuda	10
Caffé del Marre	10
Joe's	4
KFC	2
The Lighthouse	9
The Lure	5
Old Navy	3
Pier One	1
Sails	7
Wheel House Pub	8
Zanzibar	6

Morne Catherine
Edith Falls, Tucker Valley, Chaguaramas Golf Course & Macqueripe Beach
Port of Spain
T&T Coast Guard (authorized personnel only)
MACQUERIPE MAIL ROAD
Cuesa R.
Police Post
Williams Bay
Boat to Venezuela
Ocean Pearl
Kayak Centre
Carenage
Chaguaramas Development Authority (CDA)
CANO VENTURA RD
Hospitality Institute
Fire Station
MARINE DR
RD
AIRWAYS
Chagville
Military Museum
Minshall/Callaloo Mas Camp
TTYA
Small Boats
Bauxite Loading Plant
St Peter's Chapel
St Peter's Bay
Carenage Bay
Hart's Cut Bay
Island Property Owners' Association Marina
Road ends
Chaguaramas River
WESTERN MAIN ROAD
Sweetwater Marina
Tropical Marine
Coral Cove
Industrial Marine Services
Peakes
Power Boats
Crews Inn Marina
Chaguaramas Bay
Pointe Gourde
Gaspar Grande
GULF OF PARIA
Carrera
Diego Islands
Five Islands
N
0
1 km

With the growth of the **independence movement**, Chaguaramas became a focus of conflict between the British colonial government and the local population, and in April 1960, thousands of local residents marched through the rain to campaign for the return of Chaguaramas. Their goal was achieved the following February, when the area was returned to Trinidad and the Americans departed.

Chaguaramas has long been a place of recreation for Trinidadians, and with this in mind the government declared the region a **national park** in 1961, also granting protected status to the area's wildlife and rainforest. The built-up part of Chaguaramas, which contains many buildings abandoned by the Americans, was promoted as the seat of the future Caribbean parliament, but these plans were thwarted by the collapse of the West Indian Federation in 1962. Subsequently, the **Chaguaramas Development Authority** (CDA) was established to maintain the nature reserve and encourage leisure-oriented businesses. In 1999, Chaguaramas served as the venue for the **Miss Universe** competition, and the resulting beautification saw an upgrade in the CDA's hotel and cavernous conference facilities. These days, though, with the hotel shut down and the convention centre only in occasional use, there's a bit of a ghost-town feel to Chaguaramas away from the marinas.

Accommodation

Despite the abundance of leisure facilities in Chaguaramas, there is relatively little **accommodation**; most visitors stay on their yachts or in the capital. However, the three waterside hotels here make a quiet alternative to Port of Spain.

The Bight Peake's Marina, Western Main Rd, Chaguaramas Bay ⓣ634 4839, ⓔmail@peakeyachts.com. Ten smart rooms in Peake's boatyard west of town, used mainly by visiting yachties. Overlooking the marina right by the sea's edge, rooms are tastefully furnished and have a/c, cable TV and en-suite bathrooms. ③

Coral Cove Western Main Rd Chaguaramas Bay ⓣ634 2040, ⓦwww.coralcovemarina.com. Rather uninspired but efficient and friendly hotel. Rooms are on the expensive side but clean and modern, with a/c, cable TV, phone and kitchenette. ④

Crews Inn Point Gourde, Chaguaramas Bay ⓣ634 4384, ⓦwww.crewsinn.com. Overlooking the busy marina and patronized mostly by a well-to-do yachtie crowd, this is the smartest place to stay in Chaguaramas, and the only one with any kind of buzz about it. The tiled rooms have all mod cons, kitchenette and balconies overlooking the sea, and there's a good restaurant, bar, gym and a lovely pool. Rates include Continental breakfast; wi-fi available. ⑥

Williams Bay

A wide cove enclosed by a forested outcrop, **Williams Bay** has a narrow beach lapped by brownish waves tinted with petrol rainbows from the boats moored at *Pier One* on the western side of the bay. Local bathers descend en masse at weekend, bringing coolers packed with food and drink and making a day of it, but the water isn't particularly inviting. Better to rent a **kayak** from the Kayak Centre (daily 6am–6pm; ⓣ633 7871), in a signposted building in the concrete lot on the eastern side of the bay. An hour's paddling costs TT$40 for a single

Ferry to Venezuela

Each Wednesday, the *Prowler* ferry departs Pier One in Williams Bay, arriving at the Venezuelan town of Guiria at 12.30pm; check-in time is 7am. The return leg of the trip departs Guiria at 5pm on the same day (check-in 3pm), reaching Pier One at 8.30/9pm. Tickets must be purchased at least two days before sailing; for fares and information, call ⓣ634 4472. Note that travelling between Trinidad and Venezuela means you'll need a yellow fever vaccination certificate.

kayak and TT$60 for a double. You can also contact Courtenay Rooks (Ⓣ622 8826) for more adventurous guided kayak tours around the Bocas islands; he also rents **mountain bikes** and offers excellent guided rides in Tucker Valley.

Chaguaramas town

Beyond Williams Bay, the Western Main Road straightens out to become the main drag of **Chaguaramas town**, flanked on either side by the rather ugly structures that were constructed in 1940 by the US military. Nowadays most of the aircraft hangars, warehouses and official buildings have been converted for use by businesses or government departments – you'll often see trainee coastguards or soldiers on parade – while the **Chaguaramas Hotel and Convention Centre** with its curving, incongruously grand flagpole-lined driveway looks out of place amidst its no-nonsense neighbours.

Next to the Coast Guard's training ground and heliport, the **Chaguaramas Military History and Aerospace Museum** (daily 9am–5pm; TT$20) is hard to miss thanks to the collection of military hardware on the forecourt, including a monumental 88-ton, US Army LARC (lighter amphibious resupply cargo) vessel, a rusting tank and a battered ex-BWIA jet, which had to be dismantled into nineteen pieces to transport it along the winding route from Piarco. Inside the main building, wedged between some smaller pieces of military equipment, the exhibits chronicle the military history of Trinidad and Tobago from 1498 to the present, as well as touching on wider world militaria and history. Although the presentation can be somewhat haphazard, it's an absorbing and occasionally touching array, worth a glimpse if only because it so sharply counteracts the usual beaches-and-palms image of the Caribbean. Tours are usually available, and there's a restaurant and bar on site. **Exhibits** include a re-creation of a World War II trench and a German machine-gun bunker, complete with flashing lights simulating explosions and battle sounds, as well as a series of photos and explanatory panels highlighting the extensive (and often overlooked) role of local soldiers in international warfare. Pirates, the Trinidadian police and local battles are also covered, with detailed drawings of the Battle of Scarborough Bay in Tobago and the British takeover of Trinidad, while newspaper photographs from the 1990 coup provide a glimpse of the turmoil in Trinidad during the six-day siege. A shop sells military prints, pamphlets and a good selection of greeting cards.

Callaloo Mas Camp

Opposite the old heliport, a hulking hangar surrounded by wire fencing houses the workshop of Trinidad's most famous mas band, Callaloo, led by designer **Peter Minshall** (see box opposite). Known for innovative techniques, high quality and immensely detailed mas presentations, Minshall and his crew have used everything from leaves to bottle tops to lengths of fibreglass to manufacture the amazing costumes that won them many a **Band of the Year title** during their glory years in the late 1980s and 90s, as well as creating costumes and pieces for the opening ceremonies of the **Olympics** and **World Cup**. Visitors are welcome (call Ⓣ634 4491), though given that Minshall last brought out a Carnival band in 2006, there's often little going on.

Chagville Beach and Small Boats

An unremarkable strip of pebbly sand lapped by muddy water, **Chagville Beach** stretches along Carenage Bay for about half the length of Chaguaramas town. It's fringed by grass and almond trees and separated from the Western Main Road by a car park and a garish *KFC* outlet. Although swimming is not recommended during the wet season due to downstream pollution, the water still gets packed

Peter Minshall and the Callaloo Company

Peter Minshall, who shared the Emmy for costume design for the 2002 Winter Olympics opening ceremony, is the most controversial and admired of T&T's Carnival designers, his unique combination of traditional Carnival characters and innovative techniques presented with a strong sense of theatre.

Born in Guyana and raised in Trinidad, Minshall studied theatre design at the Central School of Art and Design in London. He designed his first Carnival band for London's Notting Hill Carnival in 1975, and returned to Trinidad soon afterwards to bring out Paradise Lost, the first of his many nationally acclaimed presentations. Minshall's **Callaloo Company**, formed in 1991, featured many of Trinidad's best actors, dancers and artists, and functioned as a production company, mas factory and performance group. This close-knit and loyal crew took its name from Trinidad's national dish, whose various ingredients reflect the country's ethnic mix: "all ah we is one" was the company's philosophy.

Unlike many Carnival costumes, which are thrown away on Ash Wednesday, dusty Minshall creations still decorate houses throughout Trinidad. While most contemporary mas presentations tend to concentrate on escapist, fantasy themes with minimal costumes, Minshall's lavish and detailed works tended to deal with spiritual and political issues – the environment, the interconnectedness of humanity, the transience of life. Many of his pieces are more like kinetic sculptures than costumes in the traditional sense, where puppets have moving limbs and butterflies fluttering wings. In emphasizing the aspect of Carnival that allows people to escape their own identity by playing a role, Minshall continued the tradition of Carnival as theatre for all: "In most countries," he has often remarked, "people pay to see others perform. However in Trinidad, people pay to perform."

Sadly, however, Minshall's dissatisfaction with the bikinis and good-time carelessness that make "pretty mas", alongside the general lack of regard for the creative traditions of Carnival, have seen him take a step back from mas in Trinidad in recent years. He continues to make work overseas, and in 2006 brought out an AIDS-themed band, the Sacred Heart, which saw the return of some of his most popular King and Queen costumes in the form of Son of Saga Boy and Miss Universe, a tribute to the seminal Tan Tan and Saga Boy designs from his 1990 mas, Tantana. It remains to be seen if his fabulous designs will cross the Savannah stage again; check Ⓦwww.callaloo.co.tt for an update.

with bathers at weekends and public holidays. Facilities are limited: basically toilets and showers, a car park, a bar and a handful of kiosks selling snack foods, basic meals and cold drinks.

A calmer – though no cleaner – spot for bathing can be found by walking fifteen minutes west along the Western Main Road, where, just beyond Chaguaramas town adjacent to the Trinidad and Tobago Sailing Association, you'll find a small facility-free beach known locally as **Small Boats**, a popular spot for fishing and waterside liming, as attested by the paper cups, plates and other trash strewn along the shore.

Tucker Valley

Immediately north of Chaguaramas town via a signposted road just past the police post on Williams Bay, **Tucker Valley** is the hightlight of Chaguaramas, a gorgeous swathe of thick forest, most of which is undeveloped and laced with hiking trails and gentle natural attractions, all of which are heralded by signs courtesy of the **Chaguaramas Development Authority**, which promotes and maintains the pristine countryside of the Chaguaramas National Park. You'll need your own transport to travel the length of the Tucker Valley Road to Macqueripe, or up to the golf course – truly beautiful drives, with pastures and fields dotted

Chaguaramas Development Authority (CDA)

Based in the orange-painted building behind the Chaguaramas Hotel and Convention Centre on Airways Road, the **Chaguaramas Development Authority** (Mon–Fri 8am–4pm; ⓣ634 4227 or 4312, ⓦwww.chagdev.com) offer excellent and educational **tours**, led by experienced and knowledgeable guides, into the Chaguaramas National Park, most of which pass through the lush vegetation, rivers and cultivated forest of the Tucker Valley. All tours are detailed on the CDA website, and though they specify a minimum group size of ten, this is sometimes waived; equally, you may be able to join with existing bookings, many of which are with local schools. Perhaps the best hike is to **Covigne River** (US$10), a fairly strenuous 3km, one-hour hike along a riverbed, which includes a beautiful section of twisting gorge and a rope-aided climb up a waterfall to an emerald bathing pool surrounded by rainforest. On the way back, you can pick your own nutmeg at an abandoned plantation and bathe in a spring. The CDA also provides guides for the **Golf Course to Macqueripe** trail (3hr; US10), a fairly strenuous hike that affords lovely views over Tucker Valley, the north coast and over to Venezuela, as well as trips to the Bocas (see p.113). The rates above cover transport from the CDA office to the start of the hike and back, though not to and from Chaguaramas; if you're going down the islands with the CDA, you'll need to get yourself to the Island Property Owners marina (see p.113). You should bring your own water and snacks on all trips.

with enormous, bromeliad-smothered samaan trees to each side, gently rising to meet forested peaks. If you want to stop, the most convenient spot is **Samaan Park**, a grassy area shaded by huge trees to the right of the road.

After a couple of minutes, you'll pass the right-hand turn-off to the Covigne trail (see box, above) and, a few minutes' further, a haphazard group of gravestones and the dilapidated St Chad's church to your right. This is pretty much all that's left of **Mount St Pleasant** village, a thriving settlement that was home to workers during the colonial era, when this fertile valley was planted with citrus, cocoa and coffee as part of the Tucker Estate. Among the plain gravestones you can pick out the rather grand tomb of Amelia Tripp, daughter of the estate's English owner, William Sanger Tucker.

Edith Falls and Chaguaramas Golf Course

Back on Tucker Valley Road, the well-signposted left turn to **Edith Falls** takes you onto Bellerazand Road, from where the beginning of the trail to the falls – on the left of the road just before the practice range of the Chaguaramas Golf Course – is clearly marked. It's an easy thirty-minute (1.5km) walk past stands of towering bamboo interspersed with fishtail palms and rubber trees seeping black sap; blue emperor butterflies are common, and if you're lucky, you'll hear the distinctive roar of the valley's troops of howler monkeys. At the end of the trail, you scramble up a few boulders to reach the waterfall itself. Water seeps through the steep craggy rockface, sending showers tumbling 180m into the shallow pool below (not deep enough for swimming). The falls slow to a trickle in dry season (Nov–June).

Beyond the falls trail, Bellerazand Road passes **Bellerand Park** (no set hours; free) on the left, a children's playground with a jungle gym, a "human sized" chequers board, toilets and picnic tables. It's also the start of the so-called "**Chag 10**", an exercise trail around the valley with ten designated points where signboards detail various different exercises. The road ends at the **Chaguaramas Golf Course** (TT$60 for nine holes, TT$120 for eighteen holes, lessons and gear rental also available; ⓣ634 4227, ⓦwww.chagdev.com), built on a former tonka-bean plantation by American servicemen during World War II. There's a breezy bar in the **clubhouse**, the only place to get a drink or a meal in the vicinity. From the golf course, you can follow a 2.5km-long **hiking trail** up through the forest to Macqueripe Beach, with gorgeous views of the north coast at several points.

Macqueripe Beach and the Tracking Station

Beyond the golf course turn-off, Tucker Valley Road ends at the small, picturesque cove of **Macqueripe Beach**, newly landscaped following the laying of new fibre-optic cables in 2009. Despite the sign detailing a TT$10 car parking fee, entry is usually free; the changing facilities (TT$1) are only sporadically open. From the car park, where you'll usually find vendors selling soft drinks and, at the weekends, corn soup and snacks, wooden-fenced steps switchback down the neatly landscaped hillside to a concrete deck; the slip of beach below is pretty small, and the deck's wall detracts somewhat from the beauty of the surrounding wooded hillside. Nonetheless, it's a pretty spot, with stunning sunsets and a distant view of Venezuela's Paria Peninsula. The sea on this side of the peninsula is unpolluted and good for swimming (if a little chilly and occasionally clouded with churned-up sand), and though the beach can get crowded at weekends, you'll often find it deserted in the week. Keep in mind that strong currents make it unwise to swim out too far.

Just before the entrance road to the beach, a signposted right turn leads to the **Bamboo Cathedral**, a whimsical but apt name for the tunnel of bamboo that encloses a section of the tarmac, the thick foliage allowing shafts of green-tinged sunlight to filter through. It's a scene that inspired renowned Trinidadian artist and national hero **Michel Cazabon**, who included the cathedral in the many paintings he did of the Tucker Valley in the nineteenth century. Once through the bamboo, the road snakes upwards towards the rusting bulk of the **tracking station** at the top of the ridge. This huge dish was erected by the US military in the 1950s to track nuclear missiles, though its main claim to fame is less sinister. The dish's technology soon became redundant, and the radar scanner was converted into a radio transmitter in 1960; on August 12 of the same year it was used to transmit the first radio signal to be bounced off a satellite – the signal was received at Floyd Air Force Base in New York. The station was used to develop the technique until 1972, when it was abandoned. The tracking station stands on a nine-acre plateau which affords gorgeous views of Tucker Valley, the north coast and of Venezuela. On the way down, keep an eye (or an ear) out for the wide variety of **birds** and troops of **howler monkeys** that inhabit the area. The road up is often barred; contact the CDA if you want to drive up.

Morne Catherine

Opposite the military museum, Cano Ventura Road snakes northwards into the hills, arriving after a steep and beautiful climb along a road overhung with trees and bamboo at the **Morne Catherine**, the highest peak in the Chaguaramas National Park. As with the tracking station, you'll need to get in touch with the CDA if you want to drive up; walkers and cyclists have free access. A fork off to the right leads to a radar dish, but there's nothing much to see there; instead, stop anywhere along the road to appreciate the abundant birdlife, from toucans to oropendolas and hummingbirds.

Eating, drinking and nightlife

Port of Spain's lack of waterside eating and drinking is more than made up for in Chaguaramas. The marinas along the Western Main Road hold plenty of open-air **restaurants** and **bars**, some quite low-key, others very much upmarket, and while the club scene that once had the place buzzing every weekend has slowed down, the waterside *Pier One* and *Tsunami/The Anchorage* are still used to stage the occasional party, and the car parks and open spaces are put to full use around Carnival time, when huge fetes are held. You can have a night out right on the water, too; the *Treasure Queen* (Ⓣ634 2576, Ⓦwww.treasurequeentours.com) is used for regular party cruises.

At the time of writing, the waterside restaurant at Peake's Marina was closed for renovation, and is slated to reopen as *Zanzibar*, sister restaurant to the popular diner in MovieTowne (see p.102). Call Ⓣ634 4839 for an update.

Getting to Chaguaramas after dark is possible by maxi, although departures are a lot less frequent than during the day.

Barracuda Crews Inn Marina, Point Gourde Rd. Smart new bar right at the water's edge, with tables in the a/c interior and out on the decking. There's a daily happy hour (5–7pm), Latin night on Wednesdays, with dance classes from 8 till 9.30, and a live DJ on Fri and Sat. Plasma screens show big sports events, and simple meals are available. Closed Sun.

Caffè del Mare Crews Inn Marina, Point Gourde Rd Ⓣ634 3484. Swish coffee shop within the main marina building, with Italian coffees, pastries and ice cream served up on an outdoor deck overlooking the water or the indoor a/c area. Mon–Thurs & Sun 8am–8pm, Fri & Sat 8am–9pm.

Joe's Coral Cove Marina, Western Main Rd Ⓣ634 2332. Simple Italian café serving unremarkable but reliable salads, steak sandwiches, burgers, hoagies, pasta and pizza. Takeaway is available, and it's a useful stopgap if you need to eat in a hurry. Mon–Sat 11am–10pm.

The Lighthouse Crews Inn Marina, Point Gourde Rd Ⓣ634 4384, Ⓦwww.crewsinn.com. Attractive open-air restaurant and bar overlooking the marina, underneath a red-and-white striped lighthouse. Aimed mainly at a yachting clientele, it serves tasty international-style food, from great burgers to fish and chips, alongside frothy cocktails and good desserts. Daily 7am–11pm.

The Lure Sweetwater Marina, Western Main Rd Ⓣ634 2783. Lovely waterside location, with tables in the a/c dining room and out on the deck overlooking a seawater pool stocked with large fish. The menu is heavy on the seafood (try the shellfish linguine or sesame tuna steak) as well as pasta, steak and tacos. It's also a good place to lime in the evenings, with a busy karaoke night on Fri. Fri & Sat 4pm–late.

Old Navy Chaguaramas Military Museum, Western Main Rd Ⓣ634 4391. Good choice for a beer or inexpensive Creole lunch, with a blackboard menu posted outside detailing the dishes of the day, from pelau to steamed fish, callaloo and macaroni pie. Takeaway available. Mon–Sat 11am–3pm.

Sails Power Boats boatyard, Western Main Rd Ⓣ634 1712. Great little bar and restaurant patronized by a casual crowd of yachties and locals, with tables by the water and in an indoor bar area with a pool table. Local-style lunches start at around TT$40, and there's always a daily special, perhaps stuffed flying fish with ground provisions or stewed beef. The dinner menu includes such things as shepherd's pie and fish and chips, and there's usually a genial drinking crowd to lime with after you eat. Mon–Fri 11am–1am, Fri & Sat 8am–late.

Wheel House Pub Western Main Rd Ⓣ634 2339. Tucked into the tiny marina just past Crews Inn, this is a cool little spot for drink or a local meal, with shaded tables overlooking the bobbing boats and a pool table in the a/c interior. There's barbecue on Wed, and shark 'n' bake on Fri. Daily 10am–late.

The Bocas

When Trinidadians refer to the **BOCAS**, they talk of "down the islands" in tones of wistful longing. These rocky islets are separated from the mainland, and from one another, by the **Bocas del Dragon** (**Dragon's Mouth**), a series of channels connecting the Gulf of Paria with the Caribbean. The name is appropriate, for the coastlines here are jagged and rocky, and the sea hides treacherous currents and undertows that can make even the short journey to the nearest island, **Gaspar Grande**, a rough ride. Dolphins frequent the waters here, so keep your eyes peeled; if you're lucky, you may see a leatherback turtle or a pilot whale.

The islands had a thriving **whaling industry** in the eighteenth century, with whaling stations on Gaspar Grande, **Monos** and **Chacachacare**. Today the Bocas are sparsely inhabited, lacking any roads and with dense forest covering the interiors and holiday homes, accessible only by boat, scattered along the coasts. For Trinis the islands have always been a popular weekend getaway from the mainland, when yachts drop anchor in the bays for an afternoon of eating, drinking and swimming. However, few people explore the islands themselves and, apart from one intermittently functioning

Trinbago festivals

Trinbagonians are famed for their party-hard ethic, and this dedication to good times is most evident in the annual Carnival, a joyful, all-encompassing event that quite possibly delivers the most fun you'll ever have. But the party certainly doesn't stop there. The T&T festival calendar notches up a host of celebrations, from the dye-squirting antics of Phagwah to Tobago beach parties during Great Race and the annual harvest and fishermen's festivals, not to mention the goat racing shenanigans around Easter. There's a full calendar of events on p.35, and some of the best festivals are summarized here.

Children's Carnival parade ▲

Dame Lorraine traditional mas ▼

Pretty mas on the road ▼

Carnival

Unlike Rio, Trinidad's Carnival is all about participation: anyone with a willingness to wine can sign up with a masquerade band and dance through the streets in costumed glory, whether it's the spangly bikini and feathered head-dress of "pretty mas", the sailor suit favoured by the steel bands or the more creative costumes of traditional-style bands such as MacFarlane.

Preceded by weeks of all-night outdoor **fetes** as well as competitions for the best calypso and soca singer and steel-pan band, the parades start with **Jouvert**, an anarchic and raunchy early-hours orgy of pure, unadulterated bacchanalia, with generous coatings of mud, chocolate, oil or body paint – and libations of local rum, of course – helping you lose all inhibitions and slide through the streets in an anonymous mass of dirty, drunken, happy humanity. Once the sun is fully up and a hose has dispensed with the worst of the mud, the **masquerade bands** hit the streets, with revellers in basic costumes dancing along in the wake of pounding soca from the music trucks alongside traditional mas bands of blue devils, jab-jabs, firemen and fancy Indians, whose intricate costumes have space to shine. This is a mere warm-up for the main Tuesday parade, however, when bikini mas players wear their full costumes and crowds of spectators take in the spectacle of the huge bands crossing the stages in all their glory. The streets are awash with colour and Port of Spain reverberates with music and energy, becoming one giant street party until "las lap" and total exhaustion close proceedings for another year.

For more on playing mas, see p.82–83 and p.275; and for listings of panyards, calypso tents and a Carnival calendar, see p.98.

Easter in Tobago

Easter is peak season in Tobago, with visitors and Trinis alike flooding in for a long weekend of fun – hotels and guesthouses are stuffed to the gills, inter-island flights are massively oversubscribed and the party atmosphere is palpable. Alongside traditional Easter bonnet parades, kite-flying events see oversized constructions take to the air alongside a flotilla of homemade "mad bull" kites. The festivities culminate in the **goat races** at Buccoo (see p.223), in which "jockeys" race alongside their reluctant, bleating charges, judiciously using halters and a long stick to convince them to be first past the post. Once the races are over, Buccoo braces itself for the largest, most raucous Sunday School session of the year – nothing to do with Easter's sombre religious associations, it kicks off with pan playing and follows on with a sound-system jam way into the wee hours.

Tobago festivals

Tobago more than holds its own in terms of festivals, with beach parties, concerts and fetes keeping things lively year-round. Of the main events, August's **Great Race** sees a flotilla of high-powered speedboats racing between Trinidad and Tobago; huge crowds gather at the Store Bay finish line, entertained by blaring soca, pan bands and copious quantities of rum and beer. A similar scene unravels at the annual round of **fishermen's festivals** (see p.36), which celebrate patron of the trades, St Peters, by way of friendly beach parties at Castara and Charlotteville: vats of shellfish soup simmer and stacks of speakers get everyone in the mood for dancing. For something gentler, you might check

▲ Buccoo Easter goat races, Tobago

▼ Castara fishermen's festival, Tobago

▼ Devil traditional mas, Port of Spain

Erykah Badu at the Tobago Jazz Festival ▲

Squirting abir at Phagwah ▼

Dancer at Diwali ▼

out the **Tobago Heritage Festival** (see p.37), which moves from village to village and features traditional dance, music and storytelling alongside the Tobago Old-Time Wedding procession and the Salaka Feast. As for music, the main event is the **Jazz Festival** (see p.36), held by the sea at Plymouth and featuring international acts alongside the best of local talent – past performers include Diana Ross, Elton John, Sting, Jimmy Cliff, Chaka Khan, Erykah Badu and Mary J. Blige.

Indian festivals

Though **Diwali** in October lights up T&T by way of *deyas* (coconut-oil candles liberally placed around porches and gardens), and the more solemn **Hosay** celebrations (dates vary according to the Islamic calendar; see p.85) see tassa-drumming and towering tadjahs that rival Carnival's king and queen costumes, **Phagwah** (see p.162) is the most enjoyable of the festivities introduced by Trinidad's Indian population. A daytime event held in March at various sites around the island, Phagwah sees groups of singers perform *chowtals*, devotional folk songs sung in a mixture of English and Hindi; the main action of the day, though, concerns **abir**: coloured powder that's mixed with water and sprayed from home-made water pistols known as *pichakarees* or simply slapped neat onto the faces, bodies and clothes of anyone within range. It's a hugely good-natured affair, as popular with kids as it is with adults, and something akin to Jouvert without the undercurrent of wildness (alcohol and meat are strictly banned from proceedings). Anyone's welcome to join it – just don something white that you'll never want to wear again, enclose anything valuable in a watertight plastic bag, and get stuck in.

resort on Gaspar Grande, there are no hotels, guesthouses, restaurants or bars. Chances are that you'll be alone with the birdsong and the sound of the sea. The atmosphere is so still that it can verge on the uncanny, especially on deserted Chacachacare, with its abandoned leper colony and accompanying ghostly legends.

If you do want to **stay**, look in the Classifieds section of the local papers, where holiday homes for rent are often offered up. The lone hotel, *Pirate's Cove*, at Bombshell Bay on Gaspar Grande (Ⓣ634 3082, Ⓦwww.piratescovecaribbean.com), was in the process of being sold at the time of writing; check the website or ask around for an update.

Getting to the islands

The **Island Property Owners' Association** marina, on the Western Main Road just before the *Cove* hotel, is the base for boats that make regular trips to the islands; it also has a small grocery where you can stock up with food and drink before you go. Local boatman Spider (Ⓣ681 8167 or 769 2469) offers transport to and from the island; for two people, return fares are as follows: TT$120 to Gaspar Grande, TT$130 to Monos and TT$600 to Chacachacare.

If you want to **tour the Bocas** for the day, you can also rent a boat (and driver); prices depend on the number of people and the islands you want to visit. Alternatively, the CDA runs inexpensive trips to the Gasparee Caves and Chacachacare, as do Caribbean Discovery Tours (Ⓣ624 7281), who do a Gasparee trip followed by snorkelling and hiking on Chacachacare. Another great option are In-Joy tours (Ⓣ633 4733 or 753 2775, Ⓦwww.injoytours.com), who run excellent trips covering all the islands and taking in Scotland Bay on the mainland and beaches on Monos, all accompanied by entertaining and thoughtful commentary on the islands' history.

Gaspar Grande

Just fifteen minutes by boat from the mainland, **GASPAR GRANDE** (also known as **Gasparee**) is the most accessible of the islands. The eerie **Gasparee Caves** at Point Baleine – "Whale Point", named after its former role as a whaling station – were once used by pirates to hide their booty; these days, the only thing that glitters are the walls and the huge, green-tinged stalactites and stalagmites. It's also an excellent place to observe the **fruit bats**, which inhabit the caves and the many local species of bird, which congregate outside them. If you want to **visit**, you'll first need to contact the CDA; turn up unannounced, and you're likely to find the entrance locked up. CDA tours, including the boat from the mainland, cost TT$95; alternatively, you can arrange your own vessel and pay the TT$85 entry fee.

To get to Gasparee Caves, follow the signposted concrete path from the jetty through the forest; look out for unusual tan-coloured trees, whose rather politically incorrect nickname, "naked Indian", derives from the colour of their peeling bark. If you've prearranged your trip, you'll meet your **CDA tour guide** by the wooden house just before the mouth of the cave. An impressive, cathedral-like cavern some 35m deep, it's a weirdly beautiful place, silent but for the chirping fruit bats and dripping water. Reflected sunlight causes calcium crystals in the rocks to sparkle, and a deep, clear, marvellously turquoise tidal pool reflects the colours and shapes of the stalactites and stalagmites. The water changes daily with the tides, and offers lovely swimming. Past the pool, there's a short path to the back of the cave, where you can gaze up at roosting bats and pick out the rock formations that have been given apt nicknames such as "the Lovers", "Buddha" and the "Virgin Mary".

On your way to Gaspar Grande, the small rocky island to the east is **Carrera**, Trinidad's equivalent of Alcatraz. Its only buildings form the prison complex, established in 1876, where convicts still do hard labour. It's said that seven individuals have braved the strong currents and shark-infested waters to swim to the mainland, but only three made it, and were all recaptured within a couple of weeks.

Scotland Bay, Monos and Huevos

Though actually part of the mainland, **Scotland Bay** is always considered as being "down the islands", since it can only be reached by boat. Right at the end of the peninsula, it's an idyllic small cove blessed with soft sand and calm waters that offer opportunities for snorkelling. Spreading back from the shore is some gorgeous primary rainforest that provides a habitat for howler monkeys and a rich array of birds and plants.

Scotland Bay looks out across the swirling waters of the Boca de Monos to the island of **Monos**, whose densely wooded interior once supported a large colony of howler monkeys – the island's name is Spanish for apes – but these are now confined to the mainland. There's a passable stretch of **beach** here, reminiscent of Macqueripe; follow the path from the main marina. Beyond the sheer western ramparts of Monos and another fierce *boca* lies the privately owned and seldom-visited island of **Huevos**.

Chacachacare

Utterly peaceful **Chacachacare** (*shak*-a-shak-are-ee) is the largest island of the Bocas and, at an hour's boat ride from the mainland, also the farthest-flung. It has none of the well-to-do holiday homes found on the other islands, and the mountainous interior is covered in dense forest. There is just one useable road, leading from the jetty to the lighthouse; the others, which serviced the now-abandoned **leper colony**, have long been overgrown, and only tracks remain.

The island's name may derive from *chac-chac*, the Amerindian word for cotton, which grows profusely on Chacachacare, or might also have something to do with the chattering of the monkeys once found here. According to discovered remains dated from around 100–400 AD, it was once inhabited by Amerindians. Under Spanish rule it became a cotton plantation, and subsequently a whaling station was established. It developed into a popular health and holiday resort with Trinis from the mainland until, to their consternation, a leper colony was established in 1887. The Dominican nuns ran the colony like a prison, and conditions provoked strikes among the patients to gain such rights as male–female fraternization. The last thirty patients left in 1984, and all that remains are the decaying wooden houses, the infirmary, the nuns' quarters and the chapel, all poking through the foliage to the right as you approach the island from the mainland. You're free to explore the structures, but as they're all derelict, you should watch your step. Also on this stretch are a string of lovely **beaches**, with pale sand and shallow, calm, crystal-clear water; these see some traffic at weekends, but are often deserted during the week.

Chacachacare is now uninhabited except for its wildlife (look out for unusually large iguanas) and the two men who work the small, white **lighthouse**, built in 1885. On the southwest of the island is **La Tinta Bay**; the name, meaning "ink" in Spanish, alludes to the black sand of its beaches. Once a favourite place for smugglers, today this coarse-grained beach is deserted save for the refuse washed up by the tide, and the odd iguana and scavenging hawk. Nearby is the **Salt Pond**, a marsh-fringed sulphurous lake that provides the perfect habitat for unusual trees such as the campecho, known locally as the **bread and cheese tree** on account of its textured fruit with a cheesy taste. The odd **manchineel** tree also grows on the island's beaches. Its beautiful yellow flowers hide the fact that it produces a toxic fruit, used by the Amerindians to make poisoned arrows. Avoid contact with any part of this tree: its sap causes painful blisters (see p.51). The CDA offers **guided walks** to the lighthouse or the salt pond for TT$135 including boat transport.

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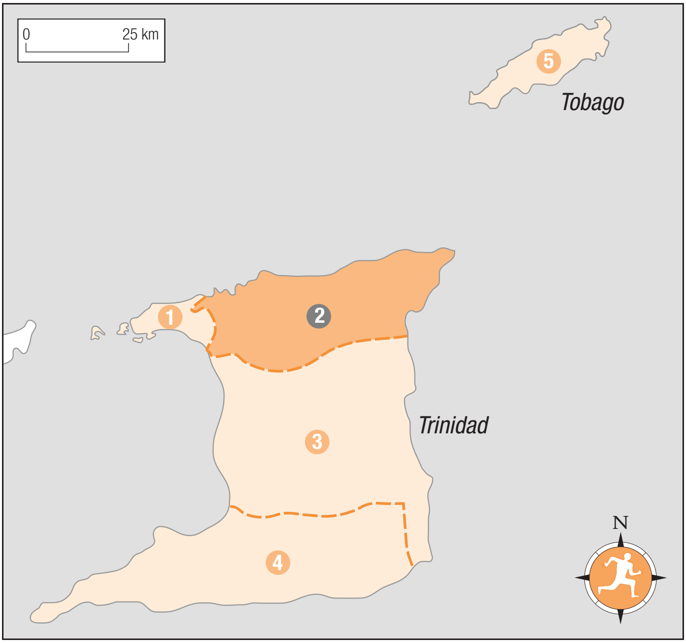
The North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CHAPTER 2 Highlights

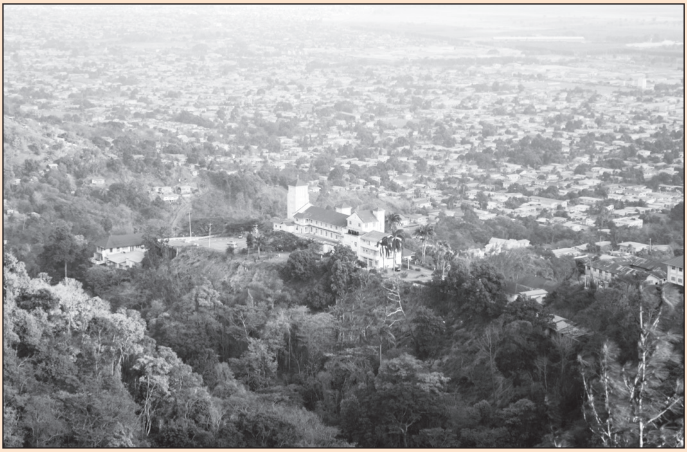
✱ **Paria Bay and waterfall** With a dazzling waterfall and grotto, this is one of the Caribbean's most stunning beaches, accessible solely by boat or along an exceptional hiking path. See p.129

✱ **Brasso Seco – Paria** This low-key eco-tourism destination in the heart of the mountains is a must for hikers, birdwatchers and relaxation seekers, with five waterfalls nearby and a variety of accommodation options. See p.130

✱ **Mount St Benedict Monastery** With a stunning view over the central plains and a fine historic guesthouse, St Benedict's offers a soothing, secluded respite from the maelstrom of the Eastern Main Road below. See p.138

✱ **Café Mariposa, Lopinot** Eat a wonderful meal of Creole-Latin specialities while being serenaded by parang music in one of Trinidad's most verdant and beguiling mountain valleys. See p.140

✱ **Turtle-watching at Grande Riviere** One of the highest density turtle beaches in the world, this village is a perfect retreat with rainforest tumbling down onto golden sand and a clutch of great places to stay. See p.152



▲ Mount St Benedict Monastery

2

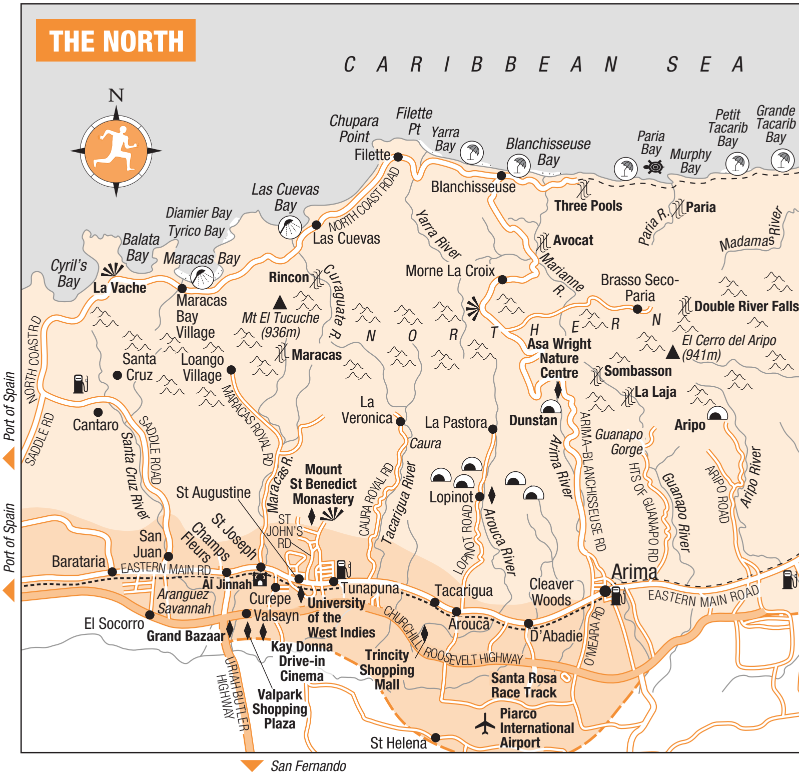
The North

The north of Trinidad is an 80km stretch dominated by the rainforested mountains of the Northern Range, which form a rugged spine, rising up dramatically from the coastline to over 900m at the peaks of El Cerro del Aripo and El Tucuche. The region is also lined with Trinidad's most stunning beaches, of which Maracas Bay and Las Cuevas are the island's most popular. Beyond is the glorious laidback seashore of **Blanchisseuse**, where the road dissolves into undeveloped coastline. A narrow pass winds through the mountains, providing an opportunity to see some of the island's prolific birdlife at **Asa Wright Nature Centre** and the idyllic village of **Brasso Seco**.

Occupying the stretch of land south of the jungle-smothered mountains is one of Trinidad's most **densely populated** areas. Though you'll see plenty of temples, mosques and Hindu prayer flags around **Tunapuna**, Indian culture is far less visible here than in the south: Creole cooking reigns supreme and the soundtrack that blares from shops, bars and maxis is **soca** and Jamaican **dancehall** rather than chutney. This **East–West Corridor** has in effect become an extension to the Port of Spain conurbation: a string of traffic-choked urban communities of which **St Joseph** is the most absorbing, named by the Spanish as the island's first capital, with a historic church and barracks. Slightly further east, **St Augustine** is dominated from the hills above by the stunning Mount St Benedict Monastery. The urban sprawl also offers access to a host of interior mountain attractions: numerous spectacular **waterfalls** and opportunities for **river swimming** are to be found at **Maracas Valley**, **Caura**, **Lopinot**, and especially from the Heights of **Guanapo Road.**

From **Arima** – home to Trinidad's only **Amerindian** parade – shops and houses are replaced by the winding minor roads that span the weather-beaten **northeast tip**. A wild and rugged peninsula, this **Toco coast** juts some 20km into the Atlantic Ocean, and is one of Trinidad's best-kept secrets. Between March and September **leatherback turtles** clamber up onto wave-battered sandy beaches like **Matura** and **Grande Riviere** to lay their eggs, backed by spectacular scenery and unbothered by the region's overwhelmingly friendly populace.

Though the north is fairly well served by **public transport** – taxis and maxis serve the East–West Corridor 24 hours a day, and every other community save for the most rural areas – a **car** is useful to visit more remote parts like Brasso Seco and Grande Riviere (the latter a 4hr drive from Port of Spain), where you're likely to encounter long waits for public transport. The alternative is to make use of the range of experienced tour guides to move you around (see p.40). There are some fantastic low-key and little-used **accommodation** options right across the region.


THE NORTH
N
CARIBBEAN SEA
Chupara Point
Filette Pt
Filette
Yarra Bay
Blanchisseuse Bay
Blanchisseuse
Paria Bay
Murphy Bay
Petit Tacarib Bay
Grande Tacarib Bay
Three Pools
Paria R.
Paria
Madamas River
Las Cuevas Bay
Las Cuevas
NORTH COAST ROAD
Yarra River
Avocat
Marianne R.
Diamier Bay
Tyrico Bay
Balata Bay
Maracas Bay
Cyril's Bay
La Vache
Rincon
Curaguate R.
Morne La Croix
Brasso Seco-Paria
Double River Falls
Maracas Bay Village
Mt El Tucuche (936m)
NORTH
Asa Wright Nature Centre
El Cerro del Aripo (941m)
Sombasson
La Laja
Santa Cruz
Loango Village
Maracas
NORTH COAST RD
SADDLE RD
Cantaro
SADDLE ROAD
Santa Cruz River
MARACAS ROYAL RD
La Veronica
La Pastora
Dunstan
Caura
Guanapo Gorge
Aripo
Arima River
ARIMA–BLANCHISSEUSE RD
HTS OF GUANAPO RD
Guanapo River
ARIPO ROAD
Aripo River
Port of Spain
Port of Spain
St Augustine
Maracas R.
Mount St Benedict Monastery
CAURA ROYAL RD
Tacarigua River
Lopinot
Arouca River
LOPINOT ROAD
ST JOHN'S RD
St Joseph
Champs Fleurs
San Juan
Barataria
EASTERN MAIN RD
Al Jinnah
Curepe
Tunapuna
Tacarigua
Cleaver Woods
Arima
EASTERN MAIN ROAD
O'MEARA RD
Aranguez Savannah
Valsayn
University of the West Indies
Arouca
D'Abadie
El Socorro
Grand Bazaar
Kay Donna Drive-in Cinema
CHURCHILL ROOSEVELT HIGHWAY
Trincity Shopping Mall
Santa Rosa Race Track
URIAH BUTLER HIGHWAY
Valpark Shopping Plaza
Piarco International Airport
St Helena
San Fernando

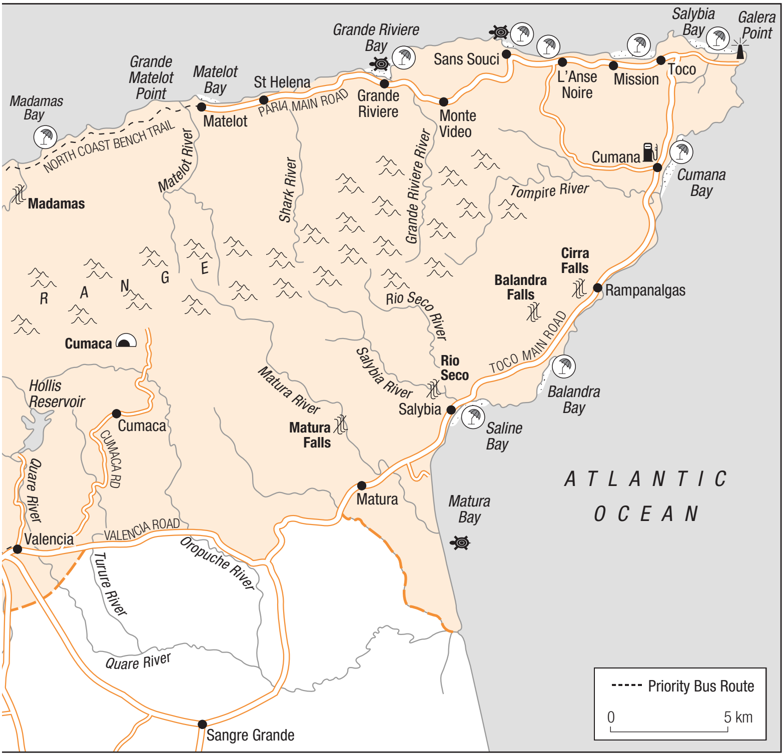
The Saddle and North Coast

Driving the **Saddle Road** makes for one of the region's most scenic journeys: you squeeze through a narrow mountain pass and descend into the lush **Santa Cruz** valley. Most visitors continue upwards to navigate the coastal fringes of the Northern Range along the **North Coast Road**, one of the Caribbean's most spectacular drives. Multitudes descend at weekends onto the golden sands of **Maracas Bay**, with glittering waters and cliffs smothered with tangled jungle: the coastline as a whole is sprinkled with fine beaches and designated "scenic areas" to stop and admire the view.

Past Maracas, **Tyrico Bay** and shimmering **Las Cuevas**, a beautiful long sandy beach also riddled with underwater **caves**, the north coast remains quiet, maintaining equanimity in the face of sporadic new villa developments. The slow-paced village life of **Blanchisseuse** is great for a couple of days, and you can choose between a host of small-scale **guesthouses** and rugged beaches. After this the coast road ends, replaced by prime **hiking** territory along the undeveloped coastline, with perfect coconut-littered beaches and **waterfalls** such as the one at **Paria Bay**.

The Santa Cruz Valley

Soon after Maraval's grand residences and the St Andrew's Golf Course at the fringe of Port of Spain, buildings give way to abundant rainforest and the road


Salybia Bay
Galera Point
Grande Riviere Bay
Sans Souci
Grande Matelot Point
Matelot Bay
St Helena
Madamas Bay
Matelot
PARIA MAIN ROAD
Grande Riviere
Monte Video
L'Anse Noire
Mission
Toco
NORTH COAST BENCH TRAIL
Matelot River
Shark River
Grande Riviere River
Cumana
Cumana Bay
Tompire River
Madamas
Cirra Falls
Balandra Falls
Rampanalgas
R A N G E
Rio Seco River
Cumaca
TOCO MAIN ROAD
Rio Seco
Balandra Bay
Salybia River
Matura River
Hollis Reservoir
Salybia
Saline Bay
Cumaca
Matura Falls
CUMACA RD
Quare River
ATLANTIC OCEAN
Matura
Matura Bay
Valencia
VALENCIA ROAD
Oropuche River
Turure River
Quare River
Priority Bus Route
0
5 km
Sangre Grande

climbs through a succession of hairpin bends to where a **junction** is marked by two 4m-high stone pillars. To the left is the **North Coast Road** (see p.120) and, continuing straight ahead, **Saddle Road** squeezes through a narrow gorge of solid rock before meandering downhill through pastoral **Santa Cruz valley**, a half-hour scenic jaunt past cattle pastures and farmland south towards the urban bedlam of San Juan (see p.134).

The valley's neat cocoa groves, flower gardens with orchids, crumbling **tapia** houses and dilapidated gingerbread mansions are punctuated by towering samaan trees and impressive clumps of bamboo, mango, sapodilla and banana, though a thriving nearby **quarry** has gouged messy yellow scars into the hillsides. Cricket legend **Brian Lara** spent his childhood in **Cantaro Village**, about 3km along the road. The place has a friendly, suburban feel, its lively main street lined with roti restaurants and rum bars. At the back of the village is a cricket stadium built in Lara's honour, with a placard outlining his remarkable world Test records.

The northern end of San Juan is the starting point for a hilly but popular **hike** to Maracas Bay along the **La Sagesse trail**; it's pretty easy to follow on your own but it's sensible to hike in a group and a guide is recommended (see p.40). It's a pleasant 8km hill walk through secondary forest with great views; to get to the start, turn off the Saddle at Gasparillo Road (marked by a signpost for a quarry) and carry straight on, passing the quarry on the right. The hike begins where the houses end; ask for directions.

North Coast Road transport

Maxis from Port of Spain (at the corner of Prince and George streets) run to Maracas Bay, Las Cuevas, and Blanchisseuse fairly frequently on weekdays until mid-afternoon, and one or two ply the route in the evening and at weekends. Bear in mind they are extremely infrequent on Sundays. Slightly slower but marginally cheaper PTSC buses run Mon–Sat from City Gate (see p.65) at 4am, 12.30pm and 5pm, returning roughly two and a half hours later from Blanchisseuse. Maxis leave Blanchisseuse at 5.30am, 6.30am and 7.30am, then at odd times throughout the rest of the day. Most locals try to hitch a ride out of Blanchisseuse – invariably quicker than waiting for public transport. Note that there is no service from Blanchisseuse onwards to Arima, though hitchhiking is possible.

Santa Cruz is also home to a very attractive **accommodation** option, 🏃 *Waterville Estate* (ⓣ676 7057 or 396 6165, ⓦwww.watervilleestate.com; ④–⑥ including breakfast and pick-up from airport or Port of Spain; all-inclusive option available), which is ideal for visits to both capital and country. Owned by a very welcoming Irish-Trinidadian family, there are two comfortable studio rooms with veranda, as well as two cottages with a private and tranquil atmosphere, set amidst abundant fruit trees with hummingbirds flitting about. Both cottages have kitchenette, stone-tiled floors and large veranda, and one is a bargain for four, with both twin and double rooms. Hiking trails are nearby (Maracas Bay is under 2hr walk), and further hiking and birdwatching is available at their sister property *Mount Brasso* (see p.132).

The North Coast Road to Maracas Bay

Taking the **left turn** at the Saddle-North Coast Road pillars sets you off on Trinidad's most dramatic drive, teetering along 300m-high cliffs and tunnelling past precipices of rainforest with occasional views of faraway peaks. Bois cano trees drop claw-like leaves onto the tarmac and mineral springs pour down into roadside gullies; the water is chilled, delicious and safe to drink. Despite its spiralling course, this is also one of the island's smoothest roads, built by the US Army in 1944 as a recompense for their use of the Chaguaramas peninsula (see p.105), which deprived residents of sea bathing at Macqueripe and other bays; it's still sometimes called the "American Road". Be warned that at weekends it becomes heavily congested.

Looking back, the first of many spectacular panoramas stretches over the Maraval valley to the tiny spice and parang centre of Paramin (see p.90) and down into the outskirts of Port of Spain. Cliffs and jungle close in beyond here (with glimpses of Santa Cruz to the right), and a few kilometres further reveals a phenomenal coastal prospect, the ocean far below dotted with rocky islets. The largest of these is **Saut D'Eau island**, a 100,000-square-metre breeding colony for brown pelicans, chestnut-collared swift and the rufous-necked wood rail.

The route is punctuated by fruit stalls and refreshment huts with dramatic sea views (look out for the brightly painted *Hot Bamboo Hut*, a friendly stop for coconut candies), the air noticeably cooling as you climb to **La Vache Scenic Area**, the highest point on the North Coast Road. The coastal views are marvellous from here, and vendors sell fruit, cold drinks and East Indian sweets to the weekend hordes on their way to Maracas Beach, while a talented **busker** improvises calypsos and will expect a few dollars if he makes you laugh. Tourist trinkets and coconut shell or crystal jewellery are usually on sale, as are chess pieces fashioned from shark bones.

Below the viewpoint, a precipitous tarmac road leads about 300m down the cliff to a former cocoa estate house on a secluded bluff. It's a lovely spot, with its own small **beach**, though the former hotel here is also the point from which to explore **Balata Bay**, a larger and pretty strip of coarse sand; take the concrete path that leads off to the right before the estate house (ask permission from the caretaker who lives here). There's also a narrow trail westwards along the coast to Cyril's Bay, another gorgeous, pebbly cove.

Maracas Bay

Three-quarters of an hour's drive from Port of Spain, the North Coast Road plunges down to **MARACAS BAY**, a ravishing generous curve of fine off-white sand bordered by groves of skinny-stemmed palm trees and with a stunning mountainous backdrop. Easily the most popular beach on the island, Maracas is an institution: thousands make the traditional Sunday pilgrimage to show off their newest swimwear, frolic in the water, sunbathe and network. Maracas is also the island's main Ash Wednesday chill-out site, where revellers come to relax after the mayhem of Carnival.

A concrete pillar with silver lettering and silver waves stands in the centre of a roundabout, heralding your **arrival**. The left-hand road leads westwards across a small river and down to **Maracas Bay Village**, a fishing hamlet whose catch – fresh carite, cavalli and shark – is in demand throughout the north. Here you'll find a couple of rum bars, a grocery and post office, alongside lots of beached pirogues and drying nets and a very pretty cream-and-blue church next door to the *Maracas Bay* hotel (see below). The village is also home to a profusion of scavenging dogs and few bathers; most people stick to the main beach to avoid the odd fishy entrail.

Continuing on the main road, you'll find a huge **car park** (TT$10 per entry; you'll get a ticket if you park elsewhere at weekends) and beach **facilities** such as showers, changing rooms and toilets (daily 10am–6pm; TT$2). At the time of writing, a new two-floor complex was under construction to house shops and an air-conditioned food court with the numerous shark 'n' bake stalls (see below) that used to spread out across the entire beach. The development also entails moving the coast road further inland onto the **Maracas wetlands**, something that many environmentalists were deeply opposed to on account of the wealth of local wildlife (scarlet ibis have even been spotted here) – and which will cause certain disruption for a couple of years from 2010. A new **Agri-tourism park** (Ⓣ305 0489, Ⓦwww.maracasbayagritourismpark.com; Wed–Sun 10.30am–6.30pm) just inland of the new building is nonetheless to be commended, offering a series of short and easy trails with labels pointing to typical crops and other tropical plants.

The magnetic road to Maracas Bay

A small stretch of apparently ordinary tarmac between La Vache and Maracas Bay has a unique claim to fame. According to local folklore, this is the "**magnetic road**", where vehicles roll up an incline in defiance of gravity – and it's easily experienced. Stop just before the North Coast Road begins its descent to Maracas Bay. As the cliffs to the right recede, revealing the Northern Range, the road ahead appears to have a definite upward incline. On stopping your vehicle, putting the gears in neutral and releasing the handbrake, you'd assume that the car would obey gravity and roll backwards; in fact you move in completely the wrong direction. Although the more level-headed conclude that this marvel is nothing more than an optical illusion, more romantic locals insist that it`s the work of God, *obeah*, or a bizarre magnetic field.

▲ Palms at Maracas Bay

Licked into a fury by passing currents and the wind tunnel effect of surrounding headlands, the waves often reach a metre or two high and make for an exhilarating swim, and the water is usually emerald green. Be wary of tides and undercurrents, however, as they're often dangerously strong; stick to the areas between red and yellow flags where **lifeguards** stand by (daily 10am–6pm), whistling furiously at anyone who goes too far out. If you tire of sun, sand and shark 'n' bake, you can have a go at the energetic two-hour **trek** across the mountains to the Santa Cruz or St Joseph valleys (see p.118 & p.136). Ask in the village for the start of the trail.

Practicalities

Though most locals travel here by private car, intermittent **public transport** is available (see p.120); wait by the roundabout to go back into town. A petrol station and police station are both to be found at the eastern end of the bay.

Accommodation in the area is fairly limited. The main option is the 1970s-styled *Maracas Bay* hotel (Ⓣ669 1914, Ⓦwww.maracasbay.com; ③-④), a bland yet reliable place at the west end of the bay. Rooms have en-suite bathrooms, air conditioning, and sea-facing balconies, but are also plain and a little overpriced. The hotel's *Bandanya* **restaurant** does serve moderately priced good food, however, with an extensive menu including fish creole, chicken and chips and a few vegetarian options, and there's a small **bar** on site.

The odd budget room is available to rent elsewhere in the village, but the best cheaper option is the delightful *Oropendola Cottage* (Ⓣ669 1772 or 797 7252, Ⓦwww.oropendolacottage.com; ③), five minutes' drive east beyond Tyrico Bay. Perched above Diamier Bay (see below), this spacious, rustic, wooden two-storey house has two bedrooms, fans, a lounge, a well-equipped kitchen and a lovely sundeck with views of the neighbouring beaches. Set in tropical gardens with mango trees and antherium lilies, the cottage is fantastic value for its setting, ideal for a family or group of friends. There's also a small **bar** on the property decorated with oropendola nests, which gets busy on weekends. Alternatively, *Waterville Estate* in Santa Cruz (see p.120) is a great accommodation option if you have your own car or like the idea of hiking over the hill to reach Maracas Bay.

When it comes to **eating**, shark 'n' bake (see p.32) is the Maracas Bay mainstay. You'll find it for around TT$25 from multiple takeaway outlets, some of which also serve kingfish, aloo and fish pies, or roti and veggie bake: *Richard's* and *Natalie's* (currently in the car park but likely to move into the new complex) are two of the top choices. Most places close at around 6pm, though *Richard's* stays open later and serves a hearty flying fish and fries for TT$25 into the night. **Alcohol** is sold everywhere, with *Uncle Sam*'s bar and grocery store at the eastern end of the bay the most popular drinking location (closed Mon) – sound systems pump reggae and soca and draw large, spirited, crowds.

Tyrico Bay and Diamier Bay

Hidden from Maracas Bay by a steep headland, **Tyrico Bay** is about a kilometre east, past two hairpin bends and marked by a black-and-white pole. Popular with the Indian community who flock here for weekend picnics, family-beach cricket tournaments and camp-outs, the bay is roughly half the size of Maracas with slightly less in the way of wave action, making it a better choice if you are travelling with children. There's also a small lagoon on the west side of the beach for very safe paddling. Luxuriant, fine yellow sand and a gentle shelf add to the feeling of calm, and there are no food and drink vendors. The only buildings are the lifeguard towers (on duty daily 10am–6pm) and portable toilets, and you can drive right down to the sand.

Even quieter is the isolated beach at **Diamier Bay**, a few minutes' drive, or half an hour's walk, east from Maracas, just past Tyrico Bay. A few metres after the turn-off from the North Coast Road, the lane divides and drops steeply down to the bay on the right (don't drive down as there's no room to turn around). The small, pebbly beach has a sheltered stretch of sand on its far side, overlooked by houses perched high on the hill; the sea in front of you is calm and practically windless. Bring your own food and drink as there are no facilities.

Las Cuevas Bay and around

After an inland curve that provides impressive views of the jagged double apex of Mount El Tucuche, Trinidad's second highest mountain (see p.136), the North Coast Road turns back to the sea at **Las Cuevas Bay**, the north coast's longest and second most popular strip of sand after Maracas. A ten-minute drive from Maracas Bay and still an easy day-trip from Port of Spain, Las Cuevas is less of a fashion parade at the weekends than Maracas – attracting families in greater numbers – and during the week it's often deserted, although the fishing community is still very active. So far, the locals have managed to resist large-scale development on this wide, clean and unadorned swathe of whitish sand, fringed by coconut palms and inviting green sea. It is surrounded by headlands, which enclose the bay in a tight horseshoe and provide protection from the wind and a relatively gentle surf. Keep in mind, though, that the legendary **sandfly** population, a particular problem in the late afternoon or after rain, can make for unpleasant sunbathing – take repellent and cover up as the day wears on. Named by the Spanish after the caves that riddle the rocks to the west end of the bay as well as the seabed, Las Cuevas offers better swimming than Maracas and is a great place for beachcombing, especially along the seldom-visited western reaches, littered with shells and stones.

Practicalities

For getting to Las Cuevas by **public transport**, see p.120. There's a large car park above the bay (free), as well as changing rooms, showers, toilets and a first aid room (10am–6pm; TT$2). Lifeguards patrol and put out yellow and red flags to mark safe bathing spots (daily 10am–6pm). *McLean's* bar at the western edge of the car park is a favourite with local fishermen, serving budget-priced Creole breakfasts and roti lunches alongside beer and rum, and there are usually vendors on the beach selling coconuts.

Las Cuevas Beach Lodge (ⓣ669 6945, ⓦwww.lascuevasbeachlodge.com; ②–④), precariously balanced on a ridge above the beach, is the only **place to stay** in Las Cuevas. The lodge's rooms are comfortable, with tiny private bathroom and air conditioning, though the owner's devotion to carpets mean they are slightly musty-smelling in the heat; weekday rates are reasonable but at weekends prices double, making it poor value. The wooden terrace bar and *Bougainvillea* **restaurant** is nonetheless supremely attractive, decorated with fishing nets and overlooking the peninsula, and serves a good range of seafood meals.

One Thousand Steps Beach and La Filette

Between Las Cuevas and Filette, you'll find the secluded **One Thousand Steps Beach**, so called because of the seemingly endless concrete steps which wind down the cliffs – though be warned that landslides have made navigating them a little dangerous. To find it, turn down Mitchell's Trace, a dirt track opposite the larger Rincon Trace, which strikes inland from the North Coast Road a couple of kilometres east of Las Cuevas. Ideal for a secluded swim and popular with local fishermen, this curve of soft, greyish sand is backed by almond trees and a few **manchineels**, which should be treated with caution (see p.51). Be careful of strong tides here, even on apparently calm days, as there's no one to help if you encounter problems.

Inland, Rincon Trace is also the route to spectacular **Rincon Waterfall**, the largest waterfall in Trinidad, a good two-and-a-half-hour uphill trek through the bush. Nestled on the side of El Tucuche, the falls tumble over 30m of rocks before cascading into a large pool safe for bathing. You'll need a guide to find it; Laurence "Snakeman" Pierre at Hike Seekers ⓣ632 9476, ⓦwww.hikeseekers.com, knows the area intimately.

As you take the North Coast Road past Chupura Point, with its improbably suburban row of bright yellow holiday villas, it narrows and becomes increasingly potholed before entering the fishing village of **LA FILETTE**, a pretty cluster of neat houses and blooming front gardens straddled over two hillocks about 5km from Las Cuevas. A rum bar and cookshop on the western outskirts is good for watching the world go by with a "beastly" cold beer or for gossiping with the fishermen about the rumoured contraband landing spots on this part of the coast, while *The Green Mile Tea Bar* to the east sells groceries and snacks and often serves a tasty Creole Sunday lunch. A few kilometres beyond the village, a series of narrow bridges force traffic to slow down before the road passes through a teak plantation, after which you enter **YARRA**, a rather deserted hamlet. Look out for a grassy turn-off towards the sea, the only one not leading to a house; this goes to **Yarra Beach**, another perfect, wide and deserted seashore. A Yarra River tributary runs down to the sea here, and is sometimes deep enough for you to whitewater bodysurf right into the ocean. As always on this coast, be sensible if you feel strong tides.

If you're looking to **stay** in the area – with unlimited seclusion – a small rustic wooden cottage is available for rent (②) from Gunda at *Island Experiences* (see p.41). Basic, with outside toilet and kitchen, the setting by the river is nonetheless stunning, with soursop, guava, avocado and cashew trees.

Blanchisseuse

A five-minute drive from Yarra and the last village before the North Coast Road trails off into the bush, **BLANCHISSEUSE** (pronounced "blaan-she-shers"), is a popular holiday retreat for Trinidadians. Local folklore suggests the name comes from a white woman – probably a French Creole plantation owner – who was seen washing here in the Marianne River. With a population of around three thousand and spanning over 3km of road, Blanchisseuse isn't exactly a hamlet, and its clutch of ever-growing flashy holiday homes – some garish, some tasteful – are testament to its popularity. Even so it's still pretty quiet; the atmosphere is relaxed and friendly, and most visitors are weekend day-trippers from Port of Spain or Arima. The few overseas tourists that do visit this Caribbean gem divide their time between the four marvellous sandy **beaches**, make the hike to gorgeous **Paria Bay** and Falls (see p.129), or walk through the rainforest for river swimming at nearby **Three Pools**, or **Avocat Falls** on the Arima–Blanchisseuse Road (see p.129).

Arrival, information and accommodation

For details of **public transport** to Blanchisseuse, see p.120. Bear in mind that there is no transport to Brasso Seco and Arima (though an infrequent service operates between the two), so hitching or hiring a vehicle/driver is the best option. There's a **post office** in the lower village (Mon–Sat 8am–4pm), and intermittent **internet** is available at the Communications Centre (9am–7pm; ⓣ669 2432), behind the playing field in the upper village. Opposite *Almond Brook* guesthouse is Bobb's Artistic Creations, which sells beautifully carved walking sticks, masks, mirror frames and wall hangings made from calabashes and poui, cedar and mahogany.

Almond Brook ⓣ758 0481. The most atmospheric place in the upper village. Its wood-panelled rooms have mosquito nets, private bathrooms and queen-size beds, though are without locks; valuables can be left with the owner. There's a communal kitchen, though a good breakfast is included. Genial owner Horace spent years working as a session drummer for soul and jazz greats in the US, and also now offers airport pick-ups and tours by minibus or boat. ②–③

Laguna Mar ⓣ669 2963 or 628 3731, ⓕ628 3737, ⓦwww.lagunamar.com. The most established hotel in the village is located just above Marianne Beach. Rooms are on the inland side of the road in blocks of six with a lovely communal balcony. Each has two double beds, fan and bathroom and upstairs rooms are noticeably more breezy. Boogie-boards are available for a small fee. Three-bed villa also available, plus there's an excellent on-site restaurant, *Cocos Hut* (see p.127). ④

Marianne Beach Resort Marianne Beach ⓣ669 4484 or 493 2136. Cheapest in town and equivalently rough-around-the-edges, this wooden house is right on the sand, offering basic rooms with foam mattresses, fans and hammocks, sleeping up to twelve. Camping is available for TT$45 per tent including use of toilets and showers; security is rather lax. ①–②

Northern Sea View Villa ⓣ669 3995 or 759 9514. These two apartments offer few luxuries, but a great location opposite Marianne Beach and an extremely friendly owner, Eric Blackman. Both have two bedrooms with fans, kitchen, veranda and living room, and there's a homely feel with crafts dotted around. Excellent value if you're in a group. ②–③

Second Spring Lamp Post 191, Paria Main Rd ⓣ669 3909 or 379 5562, ⓦwww.secondspringtnt.com. Small guesthouse with three attractive studios and a smart private two-room cottage right on the cliff top. Each has fan, mosquito net and veranda/kitchenette. Rates include coffee but the superb breakfast is extra. Impressive grounds are lovingly tended by the friendly French/Trini owners. Located near the beach at the western end of the lower village. ③–⑤

The village

Lower Blanchisseuse to the west is the older portion of the village, a lengthy and attractive assortment of weather-beaten board houses and crumbling tapias wreathed by rambling bougainvillea and neat croton hedges. Steep cliffs plunge down to the ocean, while breaks in the palms or almond trees reveal white-tipped waves below. The small village atmosphere is reinforced by a couple of rum bars, a fishermen's cooperative, the attractive arched windows and blue porticoes of the Georgian-style **police station**, and a boxy, single-spired Catholic **church** overlooking the sea, complete with three bells housed in an outdoor tower.

Like most on this coastline, the beaches at **Blanchisseuse** are ruggedly beautiful, though they do have a reputation for **treacherous waters**, particularly between October and February when breakers crash onto the sand and surfers come into their element; ask local advice before taking the plunge. The first stretch of sand is reached by turning off the Paria Main Road just to the west of the lower village, right before the old stone bridge. A track leads down to a tiny parking area and the wide sands surrounded by cliffs at both ends are usually deserted, save for the odd surfer. The second can be found via a walkway opposite dilapidated *Surf's Country Inn*. Popular with sun-bronzed surfers, the beach has been locally renamed in their honour as **Surfer's Beach**; its true name – **L'Anse Martin** – is seldom used, though it is marked as such on the sign. There is an almost imperceptible shelf here that makes for excellent waves, while craggy rocks border each end and the forest drips down onto the sand. The third main beach is accessible by an easy flight of stone steps opposite the police station, marked by a broken sign. It's a marvellous and secluded bathing beach, with 100m of soft greyish sand, headlands offering protection, and almonds and sea grapes tangling down the cliffs. The fishermen's beach – 50m back down the road next to the cooperative – is a better place to lime than swim, as it has a measly pebble shore.

Upper Blanchisseuse begins after the Paria Main Road loops inland to meet the improbably large intersection with the Arima–Blanchisseuse Road (see p.129). This is the main residential area, with general stores and pastel-painted homes clustered by the roadside and streets trailing uphill into the area known as "Paradise". Towards the eastern end of the village are the community centre and sports field, while past here the road goes down to sea level and runs parallel to **Marianne Beach**, the town's longest and most popular. It's a breathtaking seashore, with yellow sand battered by crashing waves – the perfect place to watch the moon rising over the headlands from the east, ideally on an evening when **leatherback turtles** are to be found laying their eggs (March–June; Horace at *Almond Brook* organizes tours – see p.125).

At the eastern end the clear water of the Marianne River is partially dammed by the ever-shifting sands into a **lagoon** – an inviting place to swim, though watch out for the mosquitoes which gather at dusk. Locals tend to congregate here for an after-work bathe or cricket match, and fishermen paddle rough canoes in search of freshwater salmon (ask Mr Blackman at *Northern Sea View Villa* about **kayak rental**; see p.125). There are showers and toilets at the sandy car park and house grandly named the *Marianne Beach Resort* (TT$10) – you can park your car for TT$15. There is also a basic **café** with a handful of tables outside, while *Cocos Hut* restaurant (see opposite) lies just above the beach. Beyond, the road runs alongside the Marianne River to the Orange Suspension Bridge, straddling the water. Over the bridge, the road continues past more luxury villas before becoming a rutted bench trail eastwards to Paria Bay (see p.129).

Marianne River and Three Pools

Spanned by the **Orange Suspension Bridge** – graceful and still solid despite its hundred-plus years – the **Marianne River** is the source of much local recreation, its name dating from French Creole times. **Birdwatching** is popular here, with green woodpeckers, yellow orioles and silvered antbirds all congregating. Originating at Brasso Seco (see p.130), the river tumbles downhill, carving deep swimming pools and waterfalls along the way. You can take a watery trek south along the riverbed to **Three Pools**, forty minutes or so from the mouth of the Marianne. Most people hire a guide in the village to lead the way, but it's a fairly straightforward route you can follow independently; the easiest way is to follow the riverbed, splashing through sometimes deep water and swimming, though a

▲ Marianne River Bridge, Blanchisseuse

path does lead along the river's western bank, crossing to the east about half way (any "No Entry" signs are universally ignored). Overhung by vines, ferns and huge buttress-rooted trees, it's a gorgeous and easy wade, and the stunning Three Pools easily surpass any of the other swimming spots along the way.

The first of the three, 12m across, is the least impressive, with a **water-slide** of sorts, through a narrow channel in the rock. Passing over the grey rock, you'll find the second pool, so deep that it's difficult to touch the bottom, with another gushing channel creating a **natural jacuzzi**. The third pool is the smallest but also the most impressive, overhung by tall cliffs, with rock carved into bizarre folds and small caves you can swim into and climb up to see the waterfall above. To go beyond this point to the spectacular **Avocat Falls**, you'll need a guide; you could go with jovial Eric Blackman, owner of *Northern Sea View Villa* (see p.125), who leads a two-hour trip to Three Pools including kayaking, hiking and swimming, and an all-day tour of the Avocat Falls – as well as walks onwards to Paria Bay (tours TT$100–300 depending on group size).

Eating and drinking

Eating in Blanchisseuse tends to be of the local cookshop variety: stewed or fried chicken with rice or chips, alongside seafood if you order in advance. *Wayside Hut* (aka Philip Roddick's; ⓣ480 0153) serves up great barbeque and seafood if you phone in advance – it's in the lower village with a nice gazebo to watch the world go by. In the upper village, try *Sade's* purple cookshop close to *Almond Brook*, which serves usual Creole fare plus callaloo and sorrel juice, or *Gilbert's*, a sporadically open shack nearer to the sports ground. Expect to pay TT$60–80 for dinner. You'll also get "doubles" at breakfast time on weekends by the fisherman's coop, and roti is served here some lunchtimes. Look out for Mrs Charles, who serves home-made coconut sorbet on Sunday afternoons in the upper village, while her husband churns the tank.

The only proper **restaurant** in Blanchisseuse is *Cocos Hut* (ⓣ628 3731), in a converted cocoa-drying house at the *Laguna Mar* hotel. Owned by the charming Fred Zollna, it's decorated with a mix of memorabilia from his home country, Germany, and his travels as a US marine; it's an intimate, unpretentious eatery for a sit-down meal at any time. Moderately priced dinners (from TT$130) consist of truly excellent fish, tasty chicken, beef or pork, and vegetarians are catered for – ask in advance as there are no printed menus and dishes are cooked to order. The bar is great for an evening drink, its end-of-the-road location and regular clientele providing a sense of cosy isolation. Elsewhere, **drinking** is limited to **rum shops** like *Casbah* in the lower village (with pool table), and the *Butterfly Rec Club* behind the playing field in the upper village, both fairly lively after dark, though in general the village quietens down early. Bear in mind that if you plan to **self-cater** you'll need to stock up before arriving here; there's very little in the way of groceries on offer.

The north coast bench trail

East of Blanchisseuse, the North Coast Road gives way to Trinidad's most picturesque section of **undeveloped coastline**. The next piece of tarmac is some 30km to the east at Matelot (see p.154); in between, you'll find some impressive **hiking** along a **bench trail** – the local name for the old donkey tracks cut in the late nineteenth century to transport goods and service the then-thriving cocoa estates. Well-trodden, the trail dips and climbs through the remnants of abandoned estates and secondary forest, with the sea swinging spectacularly in and out of view.

There are periodic government proposals to construct a **road** along this stretch of the coast, but environmental groups and landowners have so far successfully lobbied against the idea and the area remains a sanctuary for bird and animal life. Many of the beaches are prime laying spots for the giant **leatherback turtle** (see p.148). Though few attempt it, you can hike the bench trail all the way from Blanchisseuse to Matelot, but only the fittest can hope to complete the journey in a day. Most make the trip in two stages, camping on the beach along the way. Though it is easy to follow, it's not a good idea to walk the trail alone past Paria Bay; there are reports of drug smuggler landings at deserted bays. Saturdays, Sundays and public holidays are prime times for local hiking groups to take to the bush. Make sure you start your hike with a full bottle of **water**, and you can fill up from sparkling streams along the way.

The moderately challenging round-trip trek to **Paria Bay** is the most common hike from Blanchisseuse. You can do each way in two hours at a good pace, though most stop to admire the scenery, take a picnic and make a day of it. Past the Orange Suspension Bridge (see p.126), the track passes beach homes for the first couple of kilometres, before dipping down to a stream and entering the forest. The trail can get a little muddy in the rainy season, but nothing can detract from the marvellous scenery: look out for massive bachac nests and a splendid specimen of the weird **cannonball tree**, with its heavily perfumed rotund pink flowers, twisted branches and trunk supporting 15cm-wide "cannonballs". There is a constant accompaniment of birdsong, though the soothing calls are often shattered by the raucous shriek of passing parrots.

Petit Tacaribe

Petit Tacaribe is undoubtedly the most unusual place to stay in Trinidad, a magical and secluded spot comprised of three cedar-framed bamboo cabanas and a cooking shed overlooking the bay (c/o Stephen Broadbridge, 9b Fondes Amandes Rd, St Ann's, Port of Spain; ⓣ624 7281, ⓦwww.caribbeandiscoverytours.com; ⑥). Rates cover great meals with lots of fresh produce (though you should bring any extras – beer, rum, chocolate and so on) and transport, including boats and excursions into the forest. Most people get here via boat from Blanchisseuse, which costs TT$200 each way and takes about half an hour; six people and their baggage can cram in, but you can always hike if you're feeling hardy.

Passing a number of stunning coves along the way, you emerge onto the **beach** at **Paria Bay** quite suddenly – it's an idyllic 1.5km of fine, coconut-littered golden sand with a backdrop of thick jungle. Other than a couple of fisherman's shacks above its eastern end, the sands are completely undisturbed, with craggy grey rocks out to sea; the high headland above is **Paria Point**. Swimming is fairly safe, with the exception of October to January/February when currents become more intense. Leatherback turtles come here in good numbers to lay their eggs in springtime, the eggs hatching from July to August. If you've walked as far as the beach then press on another fifteen minutes to the secluded **waterfall** for a fresh-water bathe; three-quarters of the way up the beach is a track heading inland, which passes through anthurium lilies and forest, reaching a fork at one point. The right fork heads up to the point and eventually to Brasso Seco – Paria village (see p.130), while the left one meets the Paria River a few minutes later. Head upstream for five minutes to arrive at the waterfall, where cold spring water crashes down the 5m cascade into a deep grotto 10m across, perfect for a dip. Blue emperor butterflies flit about for the first few months of the year, and you're unlikely to see another soul for the entire route.

Paria Bay to Matelot

Past Paria Bay, the bench trail is less well-travelled and a little more overgrown. After ten minutes' walk, you pass through attractive **Murphy Bay**, and it takes around an hour and a half to reach **Petit Tacaribe bay** (see box), with **Grande Tacaribe** over the headland (inexplicably named Trou Bouilli-Riz Point) a further half an hour. Both have marvellous sandy beaches and plentiful fruit trees such as mammee apples and mangoes. From here, it's a five- to six-hour jungle walk onward to civilization at Matelot. Gorgeous **Madamas Bay** is reached after around an hour and a half: it's a curve of deserted off-white sand with a river **lagoon** at one end, almost rivalling Paria in beauty. Half an hour inland from the beach is another splendid cataract, **Madamas waterfall**, though you'll need a guide to find it, as well as the **Madamas Gorge** even further into the interior. Caribbean Discovery Tours (see p.41) organize excellent packages in this area, hiking or by boat, and **guides** Carl Fitzjames (see box p.131), who lives in Brasso Seco, or Christo Adonis from Arima (see p.144), will organize overnight trips. Alter-natively, local fishermen in Maracas, Las Cuevas, Blanchisseuse or Matelot/Grande Riviere will take you by boat. Ask around or at your hotel; it costs TT$200 each way to/from Paria Bay, more to the remoter spots.

If you choose to **camp** along the coastline, you'll see leatherback turtles during the March–July season, and the surrounding bush is well stocked with agouti and quenk for a wild-meat dinner. Birdwatching is superb along the coast, and together with fine fishing for pampano, tarpin, jacks fish and ancho, this a chance in a million for lovers of the natural life.

The Arima–Blanchisseuse Road

The **Arima–Blanchisseuse Road** cuts through the middle of the steamy Northern Range forest, climbing high into misty, breeze-cooled peaks, between which **Brasso Seco – Paria** village is an excellent starting point for exploring the **waterfalls** that course through the mountains. A little closer to civilization you descend to the **Asa Wright Nature Centre**, one of the Caribbean's finest birdwatching sites. The sharply winding, potholed and generally ill-kept road is not for the faint of heart, but the payoff is tremendous. Light filtering through the overhanging canopies of mahogany, teak, poui, cedar and immortelle colours the tunnel-like road green, and every available surface is smothered in plant life: mosses, ferns and lichens cover rocks and tree trunks already laden with massive wild pine bromeliads, and vines and monkey's ladder lianas trail down to the tarmac.

Wet and humid, the first portion of road from Blanchisseuse is a succession of leaf-covered hairpin bends, climbing gently up from the coast, with quartermiles marked by roadside posts (though many have crumbled). Just before the twenty-and-a-quarter mile marker (around 5km from Blanchisseuse), look out for a neat grove of pommerac trees to the left; here, a track leads past a few dwellings towards **Avocat Falls**. After a ten-minute walk, you turn left along the banks of a shallow riverbed for fifteen minutes until you reach a watery junction. Wade upstream a few minutes until you arrive at a steep bank; haul yourself up with the aid of tree roots and straight in front of you is a stunning 12m cascade with a deep swimming pool. Many local guides offer tours here, and at weekends Eric Blackman in Blanchisseuse (see p.125) is available.

A short way south of Avocat, the mountain road climbs a steep hill before entering picturesque hamlet **MORNE LA CROIX**, where most of the inhabitants still speak French Creole as well as Trini English. A tiny general store and bar is the only place for limited **food and drink** here, but the main attractions are the impressive views and superb **birdlife** wherever you stop. Just beyond the town, look for a hedge of purple-flowered vervain, a favourite haunt of yellow-breasted ruby-topaz **hummingbirds** and the red-crested tufted coquette, and also for the metre-long, teardrop-shaped nests of the crested oropendola, whose manic calls can be heard echoing across the peaks. As the road climbs ever higher, a lookout point adjacent to dirt track Andrew's Trace – at 600m – provides chilly breezes and sweeping views through a break in the forest, with the sea just visible; above you can often see hawks coasting on thermal updraughts. Contact naturalist **Courtenay Rooks** at Paria Springs (see p.41) if you're interested in **butterfly** and **birdwatching trips** along the Arima–Blanchisseuse Road.

Closer to **Arima**, the road dips downhill, rounding spectacular corners and passing hillsides cleared for christophene cultivation supported on rough trellises (the fruits, which resemble avocado pears, are commonly used in Chinese cooking), and former cocoa estates left to grow wild. As the jungle thins out and a few sporadic buildings appear, look out for the numerous Hindu prayer flags fluttering in the breeze and tiny do-it-yourself temples on the eastern side of the road.

Brasso Seco – Paria village

Tucked away at the end of a well-signposted turn-off from the Arima – Blanchisseuse Road, a good up-and-down 7km from Morne La Croix or Asa Wright, **BRASSO SECO – PARIA** (known variously as Brasso Seco or simply Paria by locals) is a naturalists' dream. Translating as "dry branch" in reference to an arm of the Paria river which only ever gets wet in heavy rainy seasons, the village is populated by people of mixed Amerindian, Spanish and African descent (and clearly recognizable as such; some of the elders still speak Spanish) – many of them descended from people who moved here to work on the burgeoning cocoa and coffee estates at the turn of the twentieth century.

The village is probably the best base for **hiking** in Trinidad (see box opposite), owing to its proximity to both mountains and coastline, at least five **waterfalls** and numerous river pools, as well as its variety of **accommodation** options. Though few serious **birdwatchers** come to the area, the diversity they find here often exceeds that of the island's well-known birdwatching centres; scientists from a variety of universities have made this their base for studying rarely seen species and leking sites. Red-legged honeycreepers, bearded bellbirds,

Hikes and tours from Brasso Seco – Paria

Hiking possibilities here range in difficulty from medium half-day treks to hard overnighters – a few routes are summarized below. You will need a **guide** for almost all, not only to keep you from getting lost but to clear pathways and provide assistance in the highly unlikely event you're confronted by a snake. More likely is that you'll come across an unlicensed hunter, when it's also advisable to be accompanied by a local person.

The best guide is **Carl "Wang" Fitzjames** (wooden house at last light pole on left, Madamas Rd, Brasso Seco Ⓣ669 6054, Ⓔcarlfitzjames@hotmail.com; US$20–100), who has a camp ground halfway to Tacaribe on the north coast for overnight stays. Carl has a good knowledge of birds, leking sites and medicinal plants, organizes cooked meals and barbecues, and usually likes to share his personal philosophies. **Felix de Ramos**, aka Pepe (Ⓣ669 6144), is a hardy local older man who also has an excellent knowledge of the trails. **Stephen Broadbridge** at Caribbean Discovery Tours (see p.41) works closely with local guides and accommodations, organizes packages including Brasso Seco, and is a good contact for **birding** and local **transport**. Contact guide **Ivan Charles** (see p.145) in Arima for **mountain biking** as well as hiking tours. Finally, Amerindian guide **Christo Adonis** (Ⓣ664 5976 or 395 0999) in Arima also has a good knowledge of the area.

Moderate hikes

Double River Falls (3–4hr round trip) follows a track through cocoa and coffee plantations, with wonderful views, good birding and a brief ascent through lush jungle to the 8m falls and swimming pool, also easy by mountain bike. **Madamas Falls** (6–7hr round trip) is a further 90min on the same trail to a slightly larger falls; it's good for butterflies and birds. **Sobo Falls** (4hr round trip) is an impressive three-tier waterfall deep in the forest, while **Paria Bay and waterfall** (7–8hr round trip) follows a relatively well-worn path along the Paria River to the most stunning beach in Trinidad and equally pretty waterfall (see p.129).

Difficult hikes

El Cerro del Aripo (7–9hr round trip) is the most challenging on the island, involving steep and rocky stretches, thick elfin forest, sights of golden tree frogs, but limited views. **Morne Bleu** peak is reached en route, ideal for serious birders, with regular sightings of blue-capped tanagers and the minute bumble bee-like woodchaf. **Petit and Grand Tacaribe Bays** (8–9hr one way, or overnight with a bush or beach camp) is a forest ridge and river walk, arriving at two spectacular deserted bays; from here you could hike onwards along the coast or back to Brasso Seco, or else organize a boat to Blanchisseuse or Matelot. **Madamas Gorge** (3-day round trip) is a stunning cliff-lined river with rock pools and falls you swim/walk through; this could also be extended to finish at the coast. **Macajuel Pond** (6hr round trip) is a dense-forest hike with steep climbs to a deep pond and waterfall for swimming.

tufted coquette hummingbirds, all types of parrot, green and red macaws, the black-faced ant-thrush and the endangered piping guan are all to be found, among innumerable others.

The community is charming, languorous and picturesque, consisting of converted cocoa sheds and still-occupied tapia houses, alongside a rum shop-parlour, church, school and community centre. Houses extend up the hillsides, particularly to the south, which rises to the dramatic 941m peak of El Cerro del Aripo. Children play cricket in the middle of the road, young men lime outside the rec club and everyone has time to greet each other. Signs alert you to the **Brasso Seco Visitor Facility**, a small building with information on local ecology, hiking – and promises of internet access.

Transport to Brasso Seco can be something of a problem without your own vehicle. While there is now a PTSC bus from Arima, it's very infrequent, operating once or twice daily (phone for current timetable, see p.65). Hitchhiking is also possible from Blanchisseuse or Calvary Hill in Arima, though lifts can be few and far between. Some accommodation options (like *Mount Brasso*) organize airport transfers or transport from elsewhere, or you can hire a driver; ask around or contact one of the tour guides listed on p.145. For local **food**, a village speciality is delicious "Buccaneer" style (often wild) meat, which is slowly smoked over a fire; ask local guide and chef *Pepe* (Ⓣ669 6144) to cook for you one night. Good locally brewed wine is also available, as is locally made cocoa. If you're in Trinidad in mid-October, try to get up here for their annual village festival, which celebrates their culture, indigenous and otherwise.

Accommodation

It's worth staying a few days in Brasso Seco to fully appreciate the tranquillity of the valley. From **host homes** to **dormitories** or **private cottages**, there is some really attractive accommodation here, all offering wonderful views. If you choose to rent a house, check in advance who you can hire to **cook** for you, or stock up well from supermarkets in advance (you may be able to buy chicken, fruit and some vegetables locally).

Mount Brasso Estate C/o O'Farrell, Maraval Ⓣ676 7057, Ⓦwww.watervilleestate.com. The sister property of an estate in Santa Cruz (see p.120), this is the highest driveable point in Trinidad, on the lower slopes of *El Cerro del Aripo*. Only accessed from the village by Land Rover or on foot (pick-up available), the 17-acre grounds contain a converted cocoa-drying shed. Cocoa, coffee, citrus, soursop, orchids and boiscano trees are scattered throughout, with the rich forest surround ensuring a birders' paradise (tufted coquette hummingbird leks are common, plus hawk eagles, Trinidadian and violaceous euphonias, coloured and violaceous trogons, merlins and toucans). There's also a walkway down to a natural swimming pool. The smart dormitory sleeps up to eight (a two-bed private cottage is under construction), and there is a wonderful thatched outdoor kitchen/dining area. ②

Pacheco's Host Home Ⓣ669 6139 or 669 3781. In the heart of the village, the Pacheco family is a Brasso institution, running both shop and village school. Supremely friendly and of mixed Amerindian and Spanish descent, Mrs Pacheco makes her own pink grapefruit candy and hot cocoa, from chocolate grown locally – stop by even if you're not staying here. The rooms in one of the two houses are basic but serviceable, with fans. Rates include a big breakfast; packed lunch and dinner are a little extra. ②

Paria Falls Nature Resort Ⓣ657 1118 or 680 3229. A grand name for two cottages for rent, but it's nonetheless a fantastic spot on the hillside ten minutes' walk from the village centre, with a small swimming pool and a bounty of breadfruit, cashew, pois doux, citrus and banana trees. Both cottages are private and comfortable with kitchen, lounge and veranda with French windows; one has two bedrooms with a/c, TV and stunning view, though the other (three-bedroom) is much more airy and rents for the same price – a bargain for four or more people. There's also a camping area. ③

Rosa Ford's Host Home Ⓣ669 2244. A private house close to *Paria Falls Nature Resort*. Rosa and Rupert are very welcoming and are known for their great cooking. One smart room is available to stay in, with tiled floor, TV and a good view. Breakfast and lunch are extra, at US$5 and US$10 respectively per person. ③

Asa Wright Nature Centre and around

Internationally famous for birdwatching, the 800 square-kilometre **Asa Wright Nature Centre** (Ⓣ667 4655 or in the US 1-800/426 7781, Ⓦwww.asawright.org; ⑦; open to the public daily 9am–5pm; US$12, including a 90-minute tour) was originally a coffee, citrus and cocoa plantation. In 1947 it was bought by Dr Newcome Wright and his Icelandic wife, Asa. Both were keen naturalists and birdwatchers, so when the New York Zoological Society set up the Simla Tropical Research Station on neighbouring land, the couple began to accommodate visiting researchers. After her husband died, Mrs Wright sold the land on condition it remained a **conservation area**. A non-profit-making trust was set up in 1967, which established a nature centre for naturalists and birdwatchers, a first in the Caribbean. Simla donated its land and research station to the centre in 1970 – tropical research is still undertaken today.

Today, Asa Wright is the Caribbean's most popular **birdwatching retreat**, with a staff of 75. The centre revolves around its tapia **great house**, a maze of polished mahogany floors, stately heirlooms and antique furniture. At 360m above sea level, the views of the Arima valley rainforest are spectacular, and since Mrs Wright began feeding birds here in the 1950s, the **veranda** has attracted up to forty species per day, including dazzlingly colourful, thumb-sized hummingbirds, green- and red-legged honeycreepers, blue-grey tanagers, white-bearded or golden-headed manakins and precocious bananaquits.

Matte lizards and agoutis clear up the scraps, three species of tarantula are easily seen at night around the drive, and the trees glitter with the bright feathers of nesting and roosting birds: rufous-tailed jacamars, toucans, mot-mots, woodpeckers, trogons, yellow orioles and the yellow-tailed crested oropendola. The multitude of creatures attracts daily crowds of birdwatchers, the low murmur of voices broken by the excited squeals of an unusual sighting (noted in a log book), or by the click of paparazzi-style cameras. Coffee is still grown and processed on site in the traditional method; you can see this and also purchase bags of fresh beans. **Resident guests** tend to be middle-aged to retired North American or British bird fanatics, enthusiastically compiling checklists of the day's sightings over sunset rum punches, single malts and reminiscences of the good old days. Tours from docked **cruise ships** tend to crowd the centre from mid-morning to mid-afternoon, January to April (Mon–Fri); if you're not staying here but still wish to do some birdwatching, arrive before 10am to avoid the rush.

An excellent buffet **lunch** costs TT$120 (Mon–Sat, TT$40 more on Sun); sandwiches are available on the veranda for a little less. There is also a small shop selling crafts, field guides, coffee and bird feeders. A network of well-marked **trails** thread through the grounds, which you can only access on a group tour; day visitors can join one of the expertly conducted 90-minute introductory **tours** (daily 10.30am & 1.30pm; included in entrance fee). The "Discovery Tour" is also well worth the time if you're interested in medicinal plants. Residents of more than three nights get a tour of **Dunston Cave**, which houses the world's most accessible colony of **oilbirds**.

Accommodation is situated in 24 comfortable (though not luxurious) rooms in a number of lodges. All have large screened verandas, private bathroom and two double beds; rates include all meals, afternoon tea, and access to a natural grotto for river swimming. Field trips by experienced guides to other birdwatching sites like Caroni swamp (see p.160) are also on offer to residents (US$40–100 per person). You could also consider staying in Blanchisseuse (see p.120) or Brasso Seco (p.130) if you're looking for less expensive accommodation in reach of Asa Wright, though consider **transport** issues if you don't have your own car. Buses are few and far between, though all guides listed on p.130 can arrange tours here, and Asa Wright have their own drivers to pick you up if necessary.

Alta Vista Rainforest Resort

For those who want a slightly cheaper brush with nature, the **Alta Vista Rainforest Resort** (ⓣ629 3262 or 771 5301, ⓦwww.come.to/alta-vista; ②, book in advance as there are rarely people on site), a couple of bends up from Asa Wright, offers the natural rainforest experience at bargain prices. Six rudimentary log cabins, sleeping up to three people with bed and curtained-off shower, toilet and sink, with veranda, are surrounded by lush rainforest gardens rich in birdlife. Steps descending under christophene plants lead to a fresh-water pool fed by a mountain spring. Electricity is provided from solar power and meals (TT$50) use homegrown herbs, vegetables and fruit. If you're the only guests, you can use the communal kitchen, otherwise a cook is brought onto site. Day visitors pay a TT$150 entrance fee to use the picnic facilities and walk the variety of trails.

The East–West Corridor

Running along the southern flank of the Northern Range, the **East–West Corridor** is a sprawling conurbation between Trinidad's east and west coasts, its numerous communities so close together it's hard to tell where one tails off and another begins. Its whole length is traversed by three separate roads running parallel: the first, the traffic-clogged **Eastern Main Road** (EMR) is lined with shops, businesses, restaurants and rum bars for almost its entire distance; people partially avoid the rush by taking the second road, the **Priority Bus Route** – a fast-track thoroughfare for public transport just south of the EMR, built where the now-obsolete **train tracks** were once in service; the third is the multi-lane **Churchill Roosevelt Highway** a kilometre or so to the south. The highway has encouraged major development in the form of three large **shopping malls**, signposted along its route, while it's also the access point for **Piarco International Airport**.

Frenetic, hot and dusty as it is, the East–West Corridor does have sights worth seeing. The EMR is the gateway to the old Spanish **capital** of **St Joseph**, where elegant colonial edifices sit incongruously with a more recent rash of concrete. The **Mount St Benedict Monastery** dominates the hillside eastwards, providing panoramic views of the Caroni Plains, superlative **birdwatching**, and a restive spot for **afternoon tea**. Heading north into the mountains, a series of access roads to **Maracas**, **Caura**, **Lopinot** and **Guanapo** all offer off-the-beaten-path waterfalls, river swimming and hiking. In terms of **accommodation**, much of the area can be visited on day-trips from the capital. That said, a couple of very attractive options exist at St Joseph and Mount St Benedict, and those in larger town **Arima** are conveniently close to the airport and other sights such as the Asa Wright Nature Centre (see p.132) and mountain waterfalls. **Taxis** to the mountain communities leave from the EMR at the appropriate junction; ask locals where to catch one.

Along the Eastern Main Road

The grinding pace of traffic along the **Eastern Main Road** (EMR) at least allows you to absorb the commercial chaos outside of the capital. Lined with shops, stalls, restaurants, bars and offices, the road buzzes with life – shoppers dodging delivery trucks throng the pavements and vendors fill the air with the sweet aroma of street food. In between the suburbs of Port of Spain and the eastern city of **Arima**, towns like **San Juan**, **Curepe** and **Tunapuna** are slung along the road; all feature frenetic crossroads, markets and great roti shops.

East of Port of Spain and its unsightly suburb, **Barataria**, commercial **SAN JUAN** (pronounced sah-wah) is focused around the "**croisee**" (pronounced *kwaysay*), a bustling junction marked by the Scotiabank clocktower, which was named when French Creole was the main local vernacular. It's a scene of agreeable, organized pandemonium; doubles vendors, fruit stalls and racks of sportswear line the streets while fleets of taxis honk endlessly. The croisee is equally lively after dark, when the flambeaux of oyster salesmen throw up whiffs of pitch oil and "power punch" milkshake vendors provide party-goers with sustenance. North from the croisee, the Saddle Road to Santa Cruz and the north coast begins. South of here, between the EMR and the highway, are the **El Socorro** and **Aranguez** districts, the latter dominated by the **Aranguez Savannah**, a main venue for the annual **Phagwah** celebrations in March (see p.162). If you're **hungry**, forgo the host of eateries on the EMR and head for San Juan's Back Chain Street (behind the bus route) where two famous roti shops compete: *Patraj* is considered by many to serve the finest in north Trinidad, though some patrons swear by the shop directly opposite, *Silvey's*.

Past the West Indian Tobacco Company and Carib beer factories at **Champs Fleurs** on the outskirts of San Juan, a large junction of the EMR leads south to the Churchill Roosevelt and Uriah Butler highways, the latter the route to the South; east of this link road is the smart **Mount Hope hospital**, Trinidad's best equipped, while on the southeastern side of the intersection, itself a mere 10km southeast of Port of Spain, is the **Grand Bazaar Mall**, with its fancy kitsch arches and turrets poking into the sky. It's worth a look if you're passing for its wide array of **shops** selling everything from books and swimwear to Carib beer merchandise and fine art, although it also has some high-end **restaurants** (Italian, traditional Indian and Chinese), and lively **nightspots** popular with the East Indian community.

Past the turn-of to St Joseph (see below), **CUREPE** is a hub for **transport** all over the island: route taxis and maxis go from here to Port of Spain, east along the EMR as well as south to San Fernando and into the mountains of the Northern Range – though if you're heading to Lopinot, you should change at Arouca further east. There's little to stimulate the imagination in Curepe, save for locally famous doubles vendor *Sauce*, south of the bus terminus, or – if you're in your own vehicle – the Kay Donna **drive-in cinema**, which screens latest releases at 8pm with sound via a locally broadcast radio station; the entrance is 100m south along the Southern Main Road from the Churchill Roosevelt Highway.

Curepe merges imperceptibly into **St Augustine**, a wealthier residential area north of the EMR, while just south the Priority Bus Route mounts a cut-stone flyover under which a road takes you to the **University of the West Indies St Augustine Campus**. Usually referred to by its acronym, UWI (yoo-wee) also has branches in Jamaica and Barbados. The campus was formerly a sugar plantation, and the great house now serves as the principal's home. Students are a cosmopolitan mix from across the Caribbean, and the campus offers numerous **fast-food** outlets and an especially comfy *Rituals* coffee shop.

Continuing eastwards past the junction to Mount St Benedict (see p.138), **TUNAPUNA** is another sprawling collection of shopfronts, churches and temples. The famous Trinidadian Third World activist and cricket writer C.L.R. James lived in Tunapuna for many years, though there's nothing left locally to commemorate his exceptionally interesting life. Close to the Churchill Roosevelt Highway off the Macoya Road, a gigantic **flag** of Trinidad and Tobago flies permanently overhead, clearly visible across the whole region. At its base is the CONCACAF "football centre of excellence", a modern complex used for the development of Caribbean football, with a 6000-seat stadium, practice fields and large public swimming pool (see Ⓦ www.concacafcentre.co.tt).

St Joseph

Old meets new as you follow the EMR east across the bridge into **ST JOSEPH**, Trinidad's oldest European town and first official **capital**. On the right is the elaborate **Mohammed Al Jinnah Memorial Mosque**, resplendent with a crescent- and star-topped main dome flanked by two minarets (there's not much to see inside, but check at the caretaker's house behind the mosque if you want to take a look). The main streets, however, are on St Joseph Hill just to the north, lined with genteel colonial French and Spanish architecture jostling with newer concrete structures.

In 1592, Lieutenant Domingo de Vera founded the town on the site of an Amerindian settlement. Christening it **San José de Oruna**, de Vera built a church, a prison-cum-police barracks (the rebuilt remains of which are to be found directly opposite the mosque), a governor's residence and a *cabildo* (town hall). In 1595 **Sir Walter Raleigh** attacked San José, burning down the church and the barracks, though by 1606 both were rebuilt, only to be destroyed by the **Dutch** in 1637 and ransacked by **Caribs** in 1640. During the eighteenth century, San José prospered as a **plantation town**, but in 1766 was hit by a devastating **earthquake**. It never really recovered, and eighteen years later the last Spanish governor relocated the capital to Port of Spain. Its troubles weren't over yet, however; in 1837, a detachment of the British West Indian Regiment stationed here **mutinied**. The soldiers, led by a Yoruba ex-slave known as Daaga, were protesting against the apprenticeship system that kept freed Africans in a state of semi-slavery. They set fire to the barracks and fought for several days before being overwhelmed. In the aftermath, forty Africans lay dead, and Daaga and two of his comrades were **executed** by firing squad.

From the mosque and police station, **Abercromby Street** strikes uphill, meeting **St Joseph's Catholic Church** after a couple of hundred metres. Sacked three times, the structure has undergone many changes since it was first consecrated in 1593, and today's Gothic stone and red-brick style dates back to 1815. Impressed by the religious devotion of the townspeople who clubbed together to fund the first stages of construction, British Governor Sir Ralph Woodford donated £2000 and laid the foundation stone. Inside, beautiful **stained-glass** windows depict the Holy Family, St John and St Andrew; the ornate Italian marble **high altar** was imported from Dublin in 1912. The graveyard behind contains headstones with inscriptions in French, English and Spanish; the oldest tombstone in the island, a weathered slab known as the **tombstone of the pirate**, is marked with a skull and crossbones and the date 1682, but no one knows the identity of the buccaneer interred beneath. Further up Abercromby Street and framed by elegantly fretworked colonial houses, **George Earl Park** was the old Spanish town square, used for evening promenades, military parades and as a burial ground.

The Maracas Royal Road

Abercromby Street becomes **Maracas Royal Road** less than a kilometre from the EMR, crossing the grand First River Bridge and winding north into the lush **Maracas–St Joseph Valley**. **Maracas** itself is a tiny place with post office and its steepled church of St Michael, the houses separated by clumps of fluffy bamboo and neat provision grounds. A few kilometres further on, the Maracas Royal Road ends at **Loango Village**, at a T-junction with the bumpy tarmac of San Pedro Road. There is easy access to **bathing pools** along the Maracas River here, the deepest usually filled with swimmers from the village. The riverbed is scattered with sparkling bronze sedimentary rocks, which fed rumours of **gold** deposits in the early twentieth century. From the pools you can **hike** over the mountains to Maracas Bay (see p.121), a stiff three-hour trek along an old fisherman's trail, or – if you've got the stamina – climb the 936m **El Tucuche** (variously pronounced *tuh-cutchee* or *too-koosh*), Trinidad's second-highest mountain (**guide** essential – see p.41 & p.145). It's an eight-hour round trip, and a section of the trail is bordered

Jumbies in Trini folklore

Douens The malevolent spirits of unbaptized children, these genderless waifs have backward-facing feet and hide their featureless faces beneath a wide-brimmed straw hat. They lurk in places where real children play; superstitious parents never call their child's name in the open, lest the douens remember it and lure the child away.

Jackalantern A mysterious light that misleads night-time travellers, luring them deep into the bush before vanishing.

La Diablesse An attractive female devil, La Diablesse wears the floppy hat and flowing gown of French colonial times, and lures men deep into the forest, never to return. At fetes, her frenzied dancing outshines the other women and attracts the men. The only way to distinguish her is by her feet; one is normal, the other a cloven hoof.

La Gahou Also known as lugarhoo, this spirit feeds on fresh blood. Iron chains slung about its body rattle and drag along the ground, and its sheaf of sticks functions as a whip; it can alter its form (usually becoming a jackass or dog) as well as changing size from minute to monstrous. A pair of scissors opened to resemble a cross and a Bible placed at the head of the bed will force the beast to revert to its human form.

Mama D'Leau Spirit and protector of rivers and lakes, Mama D'Leau sits naked at the edge of rivers, incessantly combing her long hair. Beneath the water, she has the lower body of a snake, which she uses to pull passing men to a watery death.

Papa Bois Tall and strong, his hair entwined with leaves, Papa Bois is guardian of forest trees, birds and animals. He imitates animal calls, leading hunters deep into the bush to become hopelessly lost.

Soucouyant This female vampire lives in villages as a reclusive old woman. At night, she sheds her skin to travel the country in the form of a ball of fire searching for victims, her skin kept in an overturned mortar bowl until her return at daybreak. She can only be stopped by dousing the skin in salt, which prevents her from re-entering it, or dropping piles of rice in homes and at crossroads; she is compelled to pick them up one by one until sunrise brings about her discovery.

by a tree-covered, 300m cliff, but you'll be rewarded by epiphyte-laden **montane** as well as high-altitude, mist-drenched **elfin** forests. If you're lucky, you'll see **red howler monkeys** and the **golden tree frog**, Trinidad's only endemic animal, which lives in the waterlogged leaves of wild pine bromeliads.

Most people come here to visit the **Maracas Valley Waterfall**, which crashes magnificently down 90m of sheer rock to a decent bathing pool. To get there, turn right from the Maracas Royal Road onto the signposted Waterfall Road; the turn is about 8km from the EMR. At the end of the road you can park and locate a guide at the neighbouring house. After twenty minutes uphill walking along a wide track lined by groves of tall balata trees, a path strikes off right to three tiers of mini-waterfalls with two swimmable, ice-cold **pools**. Signs warning "no candles" are puzzling until you near the main falls twenty minutes further; here you'll see clusters of candles or pools of wax on the rocks, left by followers of the Hindu, Spiritual Baptist and Orisha religions, who regard the waterfall as a sacred place. Water levels are low during the dry season, but you can almost always take a shower.

Practicalities

Route taxis run from Curepe junction to Maracas Valley between 7am and 6pm; most drivers will go off-route to Waterfall Road. For **accommodation** in the area look no further than *La Belle Maison* (108 Juniper Rd, off Valley View Drive in the Maracas–St Joseph Valley, ⓣ663 4413, ⓦwww.la-bellemaison-tt.com; ③), a beautifully designed private home with wireless internet and a veranda attracting colourful birdlife. Friendly owner Merle Lynch is a mine of local information, and it's also an excellent base for exploring the whole of Trinidad, with island-wide tours available. The three rooms have lovely valley views and private or shared bathrooms; breakfast is included and dinners served on request.

Mount St Benedict

Towering over St Augustine with phenomenal views of the south of Trinidad coast to coast is the **Mount St Benedict Monastery**. An eye-catching network of white-walled, red-roofed buildings dominating the hillside, the monastery was established in 1912 by Benedictine monks fleeing religious persecution in Brazil. The first of its kind in the Caribbean, the monastery initially consisted of nothing more than a mud-walled, thatch-roofed *ajoupa* at the peak of Mount Tabor; additional buildings were added over the years, including in 1918 a gorgeous burnt-orange central tapia house, now slowly crumbling. With a boxy steeple tower forming the tallest portion of the complex, at 243m above sea level, the imposing **church** was consecrated as an **abbey** in 1947. In keeping with their motto "ora et labora" (prayers and work), the twelve-odd (now ageing) resident

Pax Guest House

▲ Copper-rumped hummingbird

Constructed in 1916 to fulfil the Benedictine tradition of welcoming travellers, **Pax Guest House** (☎662 4084, Ⓦwww.paxguesthouse.com; ③–④), adjacent to the monastery, is the oldest guesthouse in Trinidad and remains a popular place for Trinidadians to celebrate a special occasion. *Pax* is also a traditional spot for a light lunch and especially **afternoon tea** (daily 2–6pm) – a feast of home-made breads, cakes and pastries – in its new landscaped tea garden. A favourite haunt of American soldiers based in Trinidad during World War II, today the guesthouse caters for birders, nature lovers and anyone in need of tranquillity. In keeping with their monastic history, the rooms – which lead from an impeccably clean, dormitory-like corridor – are simple and fitted with solid furniture, some of which was made by the monks. The guesthouse now boasts wireless internet throughout, and most rooms have air conditioning; you'll even come across business visitors in search of a homely, friendly atmosphere. There is a small **observatory** on the monastery property – the owners of *Pax* are normally able to guide guests around it. **Rates** include breakfast and a complimentary glass of rum punch, while after the dinner gong echoes through the corridors at 7.30pm a superb three-course Caribbean meal is served, on the candlelit avian terrace facing the rainforests of the Northern Range.

Pax has a long reputation as a specialist **birdwatching centre**. Manager Gerard Ramsawak organizes **tours** through the grounds, home to a huge array of birds; the elevation means that raptors – hawks, vultures, kites and falcons – are common, as are woodpeckers, parrots and thirteen of the island's sixteen species of hummingbird (you can hand-feed a hummingbird from the terrace). Five **trails** (30min–2hr) weave through jungle and secondary forest of Caribbean pine: a beautifully illustrated trail guide is available from the guesthouse. For a panoramic view of Trinidad that surpasses even the vistas at the monastery, take the Alben Ride trail and climb the **fire tower**, built to give warning of blazes in the plantations below.

monks maintain an estate of coffee, cocoa, citrus and planted forest, as well as producing delicious yoghurt and vegetables for domestic use and commercial sale. Mount St Benedict houses the Caribbean's main regional training college for priests, the **St John Vianney and the Uganda Martyrs Seminary**, which is also UWI's theology faculty. Nearby **St Bede's Vocational School** is also run by the monks, who teach local youngsters practical skills such as machining, welding, plumbing and carpentry. Though firmly a centre of Catholic study and worship, the site nonetheless remains inclusively Trinidadian, with Spiritual Baptists and Hindus undertaking pilgrimages here at different times of the year.

Past the monastery the road twists around a few more hairpin bends before coming to an abrupt halt at St Benet's Hall. The building houses the attractive **Top of the Mount art gallery** (☎645 1905; Mon–Fri 8am–4pm), with temporary exhibitions by Trini masters. The outside terrace commands amazing views over the Caroni plains and is a perfect spot for watching the sunset.

Mount St Benedict is located at the top of crucifix-lined St John's Road, which leads north off the EMR between the communities of St Augustine and Tunapuna. **Route taxis** leave from opposite the Scotiabank on the corner every few minutes; alternatively, there's an unreliable bus service from Curepe which plies the route every half an hour from 6am to 6pm; you could also join the evening power walkers who hike up the hill to keep fit.

For **food** and **entertainment** elsewhere in the area, you'll find the usual selection of local restaurants and darkened rum shops along the EMR, though a good local **bar**, *Trevor's Edge*, is located right at the bottom of St John's Road, hosting live music and poetry each Sunday and Monday in Carnival season, and also live **parang** in the run-up to Christmas. Just past the bank on the EMR, **Exodus** panyard is a great place to head to if there's a practice on (ask around) – especially in the run-up to Carnival when they play for hours each evening.

Caura Valley

Towards the eastern end of Tunapuna, the Caura Royal Road turns north to the **Caura Valley** – one of the most popular **picnic spots** from the East–West Corridor. Carved by the serpentine Tacarigua River, the valley was nearly turned into a reservoir in the 1940s: the inhabitants – many mixed Amerindian and Spanish – were relocated to Lopinot (see p.140) and even Brasso Seco (p.130), but the proposed **dam** was thwarted by the sandy soil and never built.

About 6km up the Caura Royal Road from the EMR is a right turn that will take you to a well-used **swimming spot**. Picnic tables line the bamboo-fringed riverbanks, and at weekends cooking fires smoulder and the shallow water is crowded with families enjoying a dip – though it does often look murky in the dry season. There are several walking and mountain biking dirt tracks of varying lengths into the **Tacarigua Forest Reserve**, an attractive patchwork of abandoned plantations and lower montane woodlands. Hikes range from ten-minute jaunts to whole-day adventures to the peak of El Tucuche; tour guides Courtenay Rooks and Ivan Charles (see p.141) both organize excellent, if challenging, **mountain-bike tours** to a point halfway up the mountain. It's an exhilarating ride, but make sure you bring cycling shorts and at least two litres of liquid to replace lost fluids.

Past the picnic spots at the valley floor, high walls of bamboo form an intermittent tunnel over the road, opening up to reveal small-scale farms and homes at **La Veronica** hamlet. As the Royal Road emerges onto the Tacarigua riverbanks, the water deepens a little and picnicking is more secluded – the road is eventually terminated by a river tributary. The drive back to the EMR affords some spectacular views of the central plains that are easily missed on the way up.

Lopinot

At **Arouca** there's a clearly signposted junction on the EMR to get onto Lopinot Road, which shoots north through gorgeous jungle and Caribbean pine. The junction also has a small market selling good quality Indian dishes at lunchtime and doubles in the morning. Ten kilometres from the EMR, **LOPINOT** is a pretty hamlet with a remote feel, clustered around a sports field and the neat flower beds of a former cocoa estate that has been transformed into a beautiful picnic spot (daily 6am–6pm; free). Regular route **taxis** ply the road from Arouca to Lopinot (Mon–Sat 5am–6pm), though the service is few and far between on Sundays.

The valley was first settled by one Charles Josef, **Compte de Lopinot**, a planter who fled Haiti following Toussaint L'Ouverture's 1791 revolution. He arrived in 1800 with his wife and a hundred slaves, and it's not difficult to see why he chose to settle in this absurdly abundant alluvial valley surrounded by high, protective mountains. Lopinot's cocoa thrived, allowing him to build a tapia estate house, a prison and slave quarters and to amass a small fortune before his death in 1819. The Compte is buried alongside his wife by the Arouca River, which runs through the valley, and local legend has it that on stormy full moon nights his ghost rides through the estate on a white horse. A photograph taken in 1981, now on display in the great house, claims to show exactly that.

The modest restored **great house** now has a glassed-over section showing the original mud walls, and the surrounding gardens are meticulously maintained, linked to the road by a quaint wooden bridge with a roof smothered with wild pine bromeliads. The grounds contain a cocoa-drying house and a dirt oven, while picnic tables shaded by several enormous samaan trees make an ideal spot for watching birds such as the white-shouldered tanager, bare-eyed thrush and violaceous euphonia. Inside the house, a small **museum** (6am–6pm; free) is dedicated to the culture of the local community. Of Spanish, African and Amerindian descent, they were relocated here when the Caura dam was proposed, and Lopinot has since spawned some of Trinidad's finest parang players. Each Christmas, a band of roving players still serenades each household, and a number of parang bars in the valley hold regular events from September to Christmas. Site caretaker Martin Gomez is a parang master himself, and he treats most visitors to a song, accompanied by cuatro.

You are greeted with more live parang at the superb *Café Mariposa* (signed opposite the village school, Ⓣ669 2581 or 684 9358, Ⓔnature1@tstt.net.tt; TT$200 per person, including full set menu and coffee; by reservation only), which serves brunches and lunches of traditional French Creole and Latin foods like tortillas, pastelles, fish dishes, breadfruit – and mango mousse for dessert – in a rustic setting amidst landscaped gardens. Parang-loving brother-sister owners Arthur and Bianca Guerrero were selected to entertain and cook for Michelle Obama and the other Summit of the Americas wives here in 2009. Most of the food comes from the Guerrero's **organic farm**, with its guided looped trails, tilapia pond, rich birdlife and labelled herb garden – you can buy organic cocoa here from source. Two serviceable wood-panelled **rooms** are available for rent, with balconies looking out over the hillside (②); rates include breakfast.

The boxy, cut-stone **La Veronica Roman Catholic church** near the playing field was originally built in Caura in 1897, but was taken piece by piece from the neighbouring valley during the Caura evacuation and reassembled here. Beyond, lichen-smothered cocoa trees line the road, and a downhill turn-off leads to the **La Pastora** chapel and shrine, one of many on the island with the title. This dedication to the Virgin of Shepherds stems from Capuchin monks who established several missions on the island during the late seventeenth century, instilling devotion to La Pastora in their Amerindian converts. Carved in the 1940s, the plain white shrine inside the chapel depicts the Virgin Mary, and is said to have been chipped directly from the mountain. Buildings thin out heading north, and the road eventually forks; a left down San Francisco Road brings you to a series of deep, swimmable **pools** on the river. There is good **hiking** in the surrounding mountains. Martin Gomez (see opposite) can arrange a guide who'll take you to nearby bat-filled **caves** – Mr Gomez actually discovered one of them himself, and it bears his name. Lopinot's annual Heritage Day, a festival of parang, food and drink, takes place on the third Sunday in November.

Piarco International Airport and around

Twenty-four kilometres southeast of Port of Spain, 3km south of **Arouca** on the EMR, and lying just south of the Churchill Roosevelt Highway, is **Piarco International Airport** (Ⓦwww.piarcoairport.com). Built in 1931 on one of Trinidad's natural savannahs, the airport is the base of Caribbean Airlines (Ⓦwww.caribbean-airlines.com; formerly British West Indian Airways, fondly referred to as "Bee wee" by locals), set up during World War II to provide a transport route which avoided the German submarines prowling the Caribbean. More recently, Piarco was given a multi-million-dollar facelift in the form of a brand new terminal, making arrivals and departures a hassle-free affair. There is also a food court, currency exchange booth, taxi rank and car-rental desks adjacent to the arrivals area. For details of **public transport** to and from the airport, see p.62.

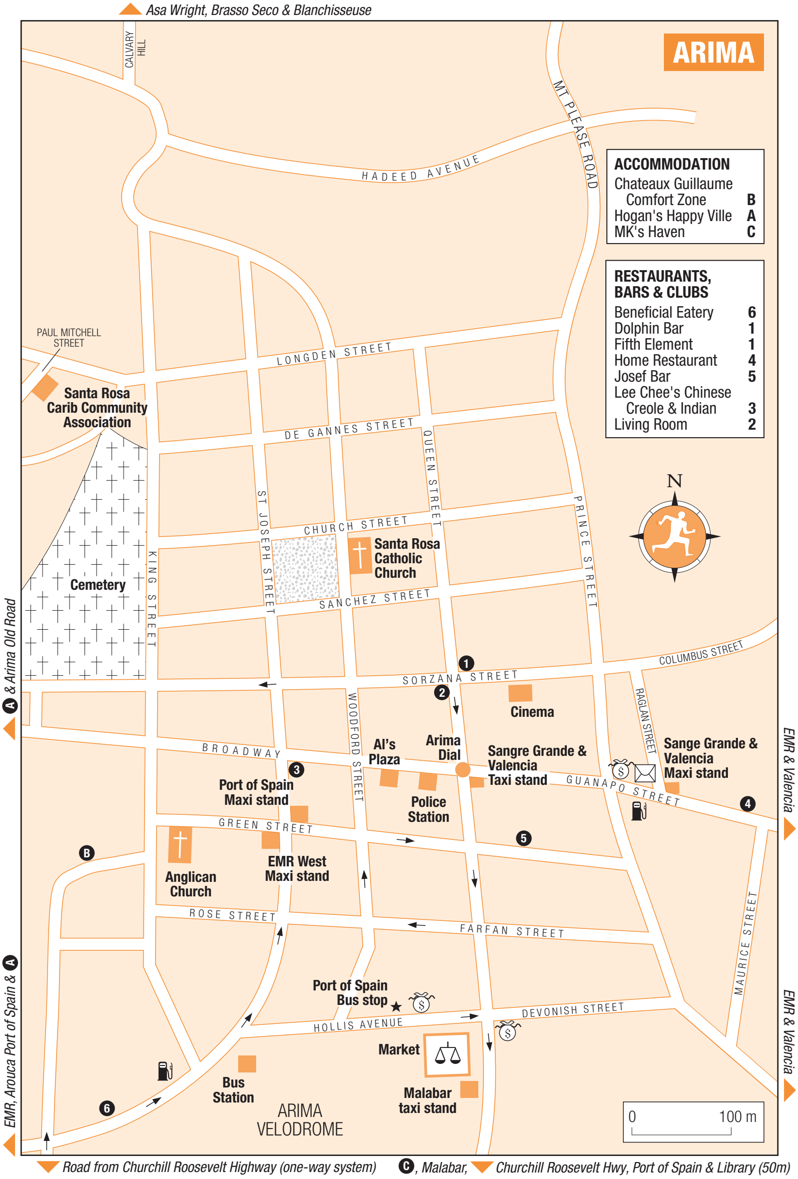
The **Piarco area** is actually an overwhelmingly rural landscape of winding country roads and small settlements. **St Helena**, a somnolent village 1km south of the airport, consists of little more than a cluster of houses, a few of which are in the traditional, whitewashed tapia style, built of mud on a bamboo frame. It's slowly expanding as a result of airport trade.

There are various **hotels** within five minutes of the terminal building – the most reliable of which is the *Bel Air International* (Golden Grove Road Ⓣ669 4771, Ⓦwww.belairairporthotel.com; ④–⑤) – but far more tranquility and charm can be found at *Hacienda Jacana* (Ⓣ498 7597, Ⓦwww.haciendajacana.com; ⑧, including breakfast, dinner, and airport pick-up; couples or groups only), a short drive south of Piarco nestled amidst trees on the riverbank. The smart wood-panelled cottages contain locally made teak furniture, and there is a pool, a lake for fishing and canoeing, and excellent birdwatching. Cheaper options near the airport are located in Arima (see p.143).

Arouca itself is fairly uninspiring and easily missed if you're not scanning a map. However, if you've got some time while waiting for a flight you could take a taxi to *La Luna*, a lively **24-hour bar** close to the junction of the EMR and Golden Grove Road (a short taxi ride away). For **shopping**, **food** and other **entertainment**, the air-conditioned Trincity Mall, the largest in the Caribbean, is five minutes' drive westwards. It has the full spectrum of clothing and food outlets, alongside a multiplex cinema, *Bootleggers* sports bar, and Italian and Japanese quality-dining options.

Arima and around

East of Arouca, the EMR takes on a distinctly more rural aspect, with shops and offices interspersed with the odd cattle pasture. As you enter the fringes of Arima at the diminutive village of **D'Abadie**, the road runs through the pines and cocorite palms of **Cleaver Woods**, home to the signposted **Amerindian museum** (daily 7am–6pm; free). Housed in a thatch-roof *ajoupa* hut, the displays are interesting, if slightly neglected, and include pottery, hunting traps, bows and arrows and equipment used to process cassava, which was farmed by Amerindians and formed a major part of their diet. Just west, before arriving in town proper, **Nutones panyard** is to be found on the right.


Asa Wright, Brasso Seco & Blanchisseuse
ARIMA
ACCOMMODATION
Chateaux Guillaume Comfort Zone B
Hogan's Happy Ville A
MK's Haven C
RESTAURANTS, BARS & CLUBS
Beneficial Eatery 6
Dolphin Bar 1
Fifth Element 1
Home Restaurant 4
Josef Bar 5
Lee Chee's Chinese Creole & Indian 3
Living Room 2
N
CALVARY HILL
HADEED AVENUE
MT PLEASE ROAD
PAUL MITCHELL STREET
LONGDEN STREET
DE GANNES STREET
QUEEN STREET
PRINCE STREET
Santa Rosa Carib Community Association
Cemetery
KING STREET
ST JOSEPH STREET
CHURCH STREET
Santa Rosa Catholic Church
SANCHEZ STREET
SORZANA STREET
COLUMBUS STREET
Cinema
WOODFORD STREET
BROADWAY
Al's Plaza
Arima Dial
Sangre Grande & Valencia Taxi stand
RAGLAN STREET
Sange Grande & Valencia Maxi stand
GUANAPO STREET
Port of Spain Maxi stand
Police Station
GREEN STREET
EMR West Maxi stand
Anglican Church
ROSE STREET
FARFAN STREET
MAURICE STREET
Port of Spain Bus stop
DEVONISH STREET
HOLLIS AVENUE
Market
Bus Station
Malabar taxi stand
ARIMA VELODROME
0 100 m
A & Arima Old Road
EMR, Arouca Port of Spain & A
EMR & Valencia
EMR & Valencia
Road from Churchill Roosevelt Highway (one-way system)
C, Malabar,
Churchill Roosevelt Hwy, Port of Spain & Library (50m)
A B C 1 2 3 4 5 6

Named "Naparima" by its original indigenous inhabitants, **ARIMA** itself is situated 6.5km from the Lopinot turn-off of the EMR, or about 7km from Piarco airport along the highway. The third largest town in Trinidad, it's also one of the most confusing places for drivers as the EMR departs from its ruler-straight course and gets swiftly swallowed up in a complicated one-way system through the urban clamour of shops, banks and wandering pedestrians; it's far easier to soak up the hustle, bustle and blaring soca and reggae on foot if you wish to explore.

Accommodation

Arima's few **places to stay** are good value, and while the town has little to offer tourists, it is a good base for exploring north and eastern parts of the island, and lies close to the airport. *Chateaux Guillaumme Comfort Zone* (3 Rawle Circular Ⓣ667 6670, Ⓦwww.caribsurf.net/cguillaumme; ③) is close to the town centre, set in a large building with attractive garden. The four rooms have tiled floors and either double or twin beds, each with air conditioning, private bathroom and TV. Owners Joan and Matthew are extremely welcoming, offer island-wide tours, a full Carnival package, and also arrange discount car rental. Rates include a good Trini breakfast and airport pick-up if staying three nights. *Hogan's Happy Ville* (193 Linda St, via Cleaver Rd and Pedro Alfonso Rd, D'Abadie, Arima Ⓣ642 0249, Ⓔcarloshogan_193@yahoo.com; ②) is a simpler but comfortable option a five-minute drive from Arima, originally designed for visitors to the nearby racetrack. Rooms have fans and private bathrooms, some with air conditioning; there's a shared kitchen and TV lounge, though a local breakfast is included. *MK's Haven* (Lot 70 Swift Drive, Phase 3, Malabar Ⓣ643 4681, Ⓔmkshaven@hotmail.com ; ②) is a simple host home with super-helpful owners in a large residential area close to the highway; you're free to use the kitchen, lounge and internet, and meals (US$10) are provided on request (rates include breakfast).

The Town

The attractions of Arima are decidedly limited: the main landmark is the **Arima Dial**, featuring a four-faced timepiece presented to the townspeople in 1898, while on **Hollis Road** the line of local street vendors stops at a small park with a statue of venerated calypsonian **Lord Kitchener**. There's an open-air **market** (liveliest on Sat), while the adjacent Arima Velodrome is the setting for many a wild Carnival fete.

The town has a far deeper history than its commercial facade would suggest, however, as it's home to what's left of Trinidad's **Amerindian** (Carib) community, most of whom live around the crucifix-strewn **Calvary Hill**, a precipitous thoroughfare that overlooks the town from the north and connects to the Arima–Blanchisseuse Road. You can still see indigenous features in these distant relatives of the Carinepogoto tribe who once inhabited the Northern Range, but links are becoming ever-more tenuous as intermarriage slowly erodes the physical aspect of the **Karina nation**, as they like to be known – Carib is regarded as a European corruption. The **Santa Rosa Carib Community Association** was formed here in 1974 to look after their interests, and their headquarters on Paul Mitchell Street, behind the cemetery, is

The Feast of Santa Rosa

During the last weekend of August, Arima's Carib community celebrates the **Feast of Santa Rosa de Lima**, making the town the only place in Trinidad where the first canonized Roman Catholic saint of the "New World" is honoured. Following a morning of church services, a Carib King and Queen are crowned, and a white gowned statue of Santa Rosa is paraded through the streets, the procession bedecked with white, yellow, pink and red roses. Rum flows, and traditional Amerindian foods such as pastelles and cassava bread are eaten. The origins of the festival are somewhat murky, but in true fairy-tale style, Carib elders relate that three hunters chanced upon a young girl lying in the woods, and brought her back to Calvary Hill. She disappeared three times, only to be returned to the community. A local priest told the Caribs that this was no normal child but the spirit of Santa Rosa, and that they should make an image of her while she was still with them, for if she vanished again, her physical body would never more be seen. They made the statue, and the girl duly disappeared, leaving only a crown of roses where she had first been discovered. Ever since, Santa Rosa has been the patron saint of the Carib community.

run by their chief (and Deputy Mayor of Arima), Ricardo Barrett (Ⓣ667 0210). The centre sells good-quality crafts such as baskets and calabashes, and provides information about Carib culture. The only remaining **ajoupa** – the traditional thatched hut – on Calvary Hill sits in the front yard of Christo Adonis (Ⓣ664 5976 or 395 0999, Ⓔcristo_Adonis@hotmail.com), a local Carib shaman and vociferous defender of his people; he welcomes visitors if he's at home, and is a mine of information on Amerindian medicine and all things pertaining to the Karinas.

Route taxis to Sangre Grande and Valencia leave from the Dial, and taxis to Port of Spain can be caught on Broadway. **Maxis** are the most constant service for Port of Spain, however; they leave from the junction of St Joseph and Green streets, though bear in mind there are separate lines for the express bus route and the much slower EMR journey. Maxis for Sangre Grande, Manzanilla, Toco and Mayaro leave from the corner of Raglan Street and Broadway. Arima has three **petrol stations** and numerous banks with ATMs; the **library** (Mon–Fri 8.30am–6pm, Sat 8.30am–noon) can be found directly opposite the music stalls on Queen Street and has free **internet** access (if you don't mind the wait); alternatively, good, air-conditioned internet can be found at CManuetech internet café, upstairs in Al's Plaza on Broadway.

Eating, drinking and entertainment

Best for **food** in Arima is the *Beneficial Eatery* at 25 Hollis Ave (Mon–Sat 8am–10pm), with a range of scrumptious salads, sandwiches, seafood and Caribbean Indian meals, alongside breakfast, smoothies and espresso coffees, all served up on an attractive outdoor terrace. Elsewhere, low-key self-service Trini eateries like *Home Restaurant* on Guanapo Street offer great breakfasts, roti and pilau at rock-bottom prices, and *Lee Chee's Chinese Creole & Indian*, at the corner of Broadway and St Joseph Street, is the best local sit-in Chinese.

Entertainment in Arima is focused on rum shops, with a few **nightclubs**, such as *Fifth Element* on the corner of Queen and Sorzana streets above the reliable *Dolphin Bar* – with a young and rowdy crowd enjoying dancehall and hip-hop – or the *Living Room* directly opposite, with a smart dress code, a young and trendy clientele and occasional live acts. *Josef Bar* on Green Street is a friendly, late-opening **sports bar** with pool tables, a large screen for football and basketball games, and a good range of music. The **Santa Rosa Race Track** (Ⓣ646 2360, Ⓦwww.santarosapark.com), off the main highway, holds **horse racing** meets on public holidays. Highlights of the racing calendar include the Midsummer Classic, run on the first Saturday in July, and the Derby Stakes, run in August or September.

Guanapo Gorge and inland waterfalls

The Churchill Roosevelt Highway comes to an abrupt end east of Arima, with barely signposted turns north to the EMR and Valencia and south into central Trinidad. The current construction of the new University of Trinidad and Tobago campus, alongside a museum and new science "Etech" park at nearby **Wallerfield**, is hoped to add a new lease of life to Arima's economy.

On the EMR itself, the scenery switches abruptly from commercial thoroughfare to rural road, dominated by farmland and an impenetrable wall of rainforest pierced by a few country lanes leading to some marvellous natural attractions. Just after the EMR meets a new road heading northwards to join the **Arima–Blanchiseuse Road** (see p.129), a turn-off marked "WASA Guanapo Waterworks" brings you to the **Heights of Guanapo Road**, which runs along the Guanapo River for 3km before petering out into a country lane, churned up by logging vehicles and best accessed by four-wheel-drive. The area is a peaceful and beautiful hikers' paradise, for which you'll need the help of a knowledgeable **guide**. Though you can drive further uphill for the lovely views at **La Laja Heights**, it's a good idea to park in

Guides

Having a **good guide** is essential for many of the hikes in the area. Locally based Christo Adonis (ⓣ664 5976 or 395 0999, ⓔcristo_Adonis@hotmail.com) and Ivan Charles (ⓣ667 5636 or 685 6206, ⓔcharlo74@hotmail.com) know the area intimately; Ivan can also arrange mountain-biking tours and rental. Courtenay Rooks (ⓣ622 8826, ⓦwww.pariaspings.com) leads a day-long hike to El Cerro Del Aripo summit (US$95); a moderately difficult hike to the Aripo caves through abandoned cocoa estates (one-day, US$75); and tours of Guanapo Gorge (one-day, US$75). Stephen Broadbridge at Caribbean Discovery Tours (ⓣ624 7281, ⓦwww.caribbeandiscoverytours.com) also offers excellent birding tours of Aripo savannahs and trips to the Aripo caves.

the large clearing below where logging workers have built a hut, and then walk, as the road is heavily potholed. The main attractions of the area are the breathtaking **Guanapo Gorge**, and the **La Laja** and **Sombasson waterfalls**, two of the most impressive on the island. With effort, you can see both the falls and the gorge in a day, but you'll need to be pretty fit.

Guanapo Gorge itself is a little nearer to the EMR than the waterfalls, a narrow deep water channel whose vine-wreathed walls of smooth grey rock tower 15–30m above the water. Dark and cool even on a hot sunny day, the gorge runs for some 400m; exploring it – wading and swimming all the way – can be quite hard work. Though you can start the trek from the southern (downstream) end, it is more exciting to begin upstream, where a large boulder blocking the river has created a small waterfall. From here, you enter the gorge by simply jumping into the deep pool and swimming a few metres before your feet meet the riverbed. Water levels vary according to the time of year (there is a risk of flash floods in rainy season), but you shouldn't have to swim further than 25m. The tiny **Tumbason River** threads through rocks to meet the Guanapo at the southern end of the gorge; a 45-minute walk upstream meets another small **waterfall** with deep **pool**.

The **La Laja** and **Sombasson waterfalls** are hidden deep in the folds of the Northern Range – a long, difficult, though exciting hike through abandoned cocoa plantations and forests of bois cano, sandbuck, nutmeg, balata and silk cotton. The trail dips and climbs constantly, but frequent use by wild meat hunters has kept the majority of the trails passable, though your guide will no doubt need to blaze a trail in the last stages. The first of the falls, La Laja is the smaller at about 20m high, with a couple of good pools below; the water is kept icy cold by the overhanging cliffs and dense foliage. Above La Laja you're in virgin forest, and the trek to Sombasson Falls is harder, but the three-tiered 50m cascade with deep pools is worth the effort.

Aripo Caves and El Cerro del Aripo

More lonely fields line the EMR for a couple of kilometres east of Guanapo, before it meets the nondescript-looking **Aripo Road**, which meanders northwards uphill for 14km into the mountains, following a valley cut by the Aripo River. As the road is rough and potholed, you'll need a car with high clearance. The road's upper reaches are pretty and pass through some quiet rural communities. If you're in the mood for a **river swim**, look out for a metal arch with the inscription "Jai Guru Data"; take the steps down the hill to a deep **pool**.

Even though they're weather-beaten and battered, you can still make out the forestry department signs along the road which point the way to the **Aripo Caves**, Trinidad's largest system of caverns. Follow the signs past **Aripo**, the last village, where you should be able to hire a **guide** (see above) – note that this is essential, not just to keep you from getting lost on the confusing trail, but to take care of the permissions required to enter the area, as it is a scientific reserve. After a cocoa grove – which sports fruits that turn purple when ripe rather than the usual orange – there's a clearing where you can park, and a sign for the trail. The fairly taxing two- to three-hour trek through undisturbed forest, with plenty of hills and gullies to navigate, is best undertaken in the dry season (Jan–March), when the three rivers that cross the path usually slow to a trickle; if it's been raining, you'll have to wade them. In the rainy season, you'll also have to get wet to enter the caves, as a river courses straight into the mouth – the going can be slippery. Nearing the entrance to the caves, you get the occasional view of the Central Plains below, and you'll start to hear the unearthly rasping shriek of one of the island's few colonies of **oilbirds** (see p.290). The **mouth** is large and dramatic, with a musty mist rising constantly. Water drips from the limestone roof, and every surface is covered with fruit stones and guano. With a good torch you can navigate the rocks and go fairly deep inside, but the oilbirds' cries near an ear-splitting pitch; the Amerindians named them "Guacharo", meaning "the one who wails and mourns". If you want to go deeper, you'll need rope, a compass and caving experience.

The surrounding forests are also richly populated by Trinidad's **mammals**, and hunters make regular forays after agouti, armadillo, wild pig and manicou. If you're really lucky, you might catch sight of an ocelot on the flanks of the 941m **El Cerro del Aripo**, the island's highest mountain. The peak is covered with prehistoric-looking elfin (cloud) forest: short, scrubby and smothered with lichen, mosses and epiphytic growth. It's a tough full-day hike from the top of the Aripo Road, but as the temperature at the peak is ten degrees lower than in the lowlands, you don't have to worry about the heat. Note that this hike can also be undertaken from Brasso Seco – Paria; see p.131.

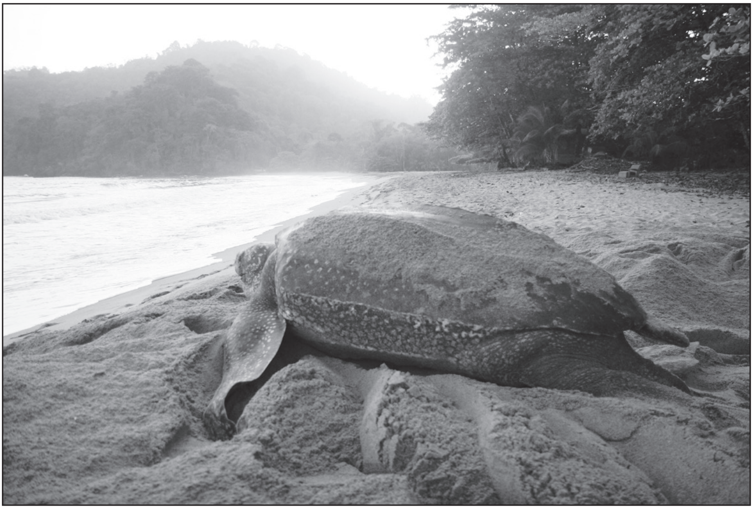
The northeast tip

The wild and rugged coastline of Trinidad's **northeast tip** feels more remote than anywhere else in the region; it takes close to four hours to drive from Port of Spain to **Matelot**, where the paved road ends. Cut off from most of the island by the dense rainforest of the Northern Range, the region seems suspended in a time warp; people and houses are few and far between and an air of hypnotic quiet pervades. The villages strung along the coast are close-knit and spirited communities, making their own entertainment at **rum shops**, country parties and fishermen's fetes. **Farming** and **fishing** are the mainstays of the economy, with tiny roadside stalls offering fruit and vegetables, plus shark oil, saltfish and sea moss.

The Toco Main Road (or "Matura Road") loops northeast from Sangre Grande to Matura Point, beyond which untamed bush and unreachable rocky coves entice you

Transport to Toco and beyond

If you're **driving** from Port of Spain, take the Churchill Roosevelt Highway until its end, turn left and then right onto the quiet portion of the Eastern Main Road to Valencia, from where the route swings north to the Toco coast. Sangre Grande, in Central Trinidad, is the region's main transport hub; most **public transport to Toco** starts here, though you may be able to pick up a route taxi in **Arima** (see p.144). PTSC buses and maxis leave from central Sangre Grande for Cumana, Toco and Grande Riviere, and they also run to Matelot twice a day, in the early morning and evening; route taxis run with the same frequency, though are marginally more expensive. Larger hotels arrange transport from Piarco airport or Port of Spain.



▲ Leatherback turtle, Grande Riviere

to scramble down the cliffs. While a number of fantastic **waterfalls** lie inland, the region's coastline is most famous for its **leatherback turtles**, which lumber up onto the sand to lay eggs between February and May, their eggs hatching tiny shuffling babies between June and August. **Matura** and **Grande Riviere** are the most well known places for guided night time turtle-watching; the latter with a good choice of **accommodation**, though its distance from Port of Spain means some visitors opt for the former, enabling them to return the same night. Most people take a few days to visit this region, however, in order to fully appreciate its awe-inspiring coastline of weather-beaten cliffs and golden beaches, with **surfers** riding the breakers.

For further information on the region visit Ⓦ www.visittoco.com, the project of a pressure group which successfully lobbied against a large port development on the Toco coast. As you're driving, tune into the only community radio station on the island – Radio Toco 106.7FM – great for giving you a taste of local life and music.

East to Matura

The small town of **VALENCIA** sits about 8km down the EMR from Arima, a bustling centre with shops, bars, the last petrol station until Cumana, and plenty of coconut vendors to quench your thirst. The **Hollis Reservoir** lies like a sea in the middle of the forest northeast of town, a serene spot for birdwatching if you go early in the morning; take the Quare Road turn-off at the "North West Water Project" sign (you'll need a permit from WASA to enter – call Ⓣ 662 2301). Slightly further east along the straight and smooth **Valencia Road**, which swings through miles of open country, is the well-signposted North Oropuche River recreational facility – a rather grand name for picnic tables by the river. There's a good **hike** 6km upriver from here, though you'll need a guide – the North Oropouche gouges its way through the rock and jungle, opening up a series of deep pools suitable for diving, the route finishing at the **Cumaca caves**, where colonies of **oilbirds** and bats are easily viewed (for a guide, see p.40 & p.141). Though there's a sign, the sharp left-hand **turn** for the **Toco Main Road** 4km further east is easy to miss – watch out for the large Radio Toco sign (continuing right leads to Sangre Grande; see p.173).

Nature Seekers and Matura's leatherback turtles

If you want to see the leatherback turtles on Matura's beach, organize a permit (TT$10) and guide (US$10) with **Nature Seekers** (Ⓣ668 7337 or 366 1031, Ⓔnatureseekers@gmail.com) on the main road next door to *Joe's Lounge Bar* as you enter Matura from the west. Established in 1990, Nature Seekers is run by a team of twenty dedicated volunteers who patrol the beach and educate locals and visitors on the importance of conserving this endangered species. Most guides come from the local community, whose indiscriminate poaching was once the main cause of concern. Now, they earn a living as guides, patrol the beach day and night, and move nests from at-risk areas, which saves over 500 turtles every year. During the nesting season (March–Aug) Nature Seekers arrange tours to watch the amazing process and provide the opportunity to get involved in tagging and recording; you can become a conservation volunteer here for a longer period. The institution runs a lovely new **guesthouse** (②–③; up to four per room; a/c and private bathroom; breakfast included), arranges **hiking** and **river kayaking** trips, and also sells attractive jewellery, imaginatively made from oddments found on the beach with gold or silver chains.

When on turtle beaches, walk close to the water to prevent compacting the sand and soil above nests. Don't discard plastic bags on the beach, as many turtles die after eating them, mistaking them for jellyfish. You can adopt a Matura turtle as a way to raise funds for Nature Seekers – for US$35 you become a "Parent" and, after choosing its name, you receive a certificate and regular updates when your turtle hits the beach. It goes without saying, avoid buying souvenirs made from turtle shells and eating turtle meat, still considered a delicacy in some areas.

Some 19km east along the road from Valencia, the elongated town of **MATURA** consists of a police station, school, health centre, a handful of grocery stores and many new and half-built houses slung along a mile of tarmac. Other than stopping for a drink, the only reasons to spend any time in the area are the **beach** – a windswept, 4km stretch of fine yellow sand strewn with coconut husks and flotsam and jetsam washed up by the fearsome waves – and a wide **waterfall** and river pool, a good three-hour hike up the Matura River led by guides at Nature Seekers (see box). There are two entrances to the beach, both marked by Forestry Division signs, the first a potholed tarmac and gravel road from the centre of Matura, and the other reached from the far side of town down a dirt track, and signposted **Rincon Beach**. Though local people often take a dip, it's not a place for the uninitiated to swim, as the currents are extremely powerful. The beach is a protected area and a permit and guide are required at all times to enter, due to the presence of Matura's real attraction: the **leatherback turtles** which haul themselves onto the sand to lay eggs.

North to Toco: Salybia and beyond

Past Matura, the Toco Road meets the east coast for the first time. The view is often obscured by a thick cover of bush, though you do catch sight of some stunning small, wave-battered coves. On the other side of the road the bush conceals recent quarries that scar the landscape for a short stretch, before you arrive in the tiny village of **SALYBIA** 4km further on, with its roadside vendors selling pholouri at TT$2 a bag.

The main reason to come here is the **Salybia Nature Resort and Spa** (Ⓣ668 5959, Ⓦwww.salybiaresort.com; ④), one of the most luxurious spots for miles around, with panoramic views, a fantastic oceanfront pool with waterfall, hidden caves and swim-up bar, and a splendid spa; more expensive rooms have the added extra of a sea-facing jacuzzi. The on-site restaurant offers good quality, moderately priced cuisine: main course options vary from shrimp in pepper sauce to stuffed aubergine. The hotel also organizes guided hikes to the Rio Seco Waterfall (see below).

The small rugged beach in front of the hotel is not safe for swimming, though a great option nearby is **Saline Beach**, a short downhill stretch beyond, across a large concrete bridge over the Rio Seco. Just before the bridge a turn-off leads down to the sands, a popular chill-out spot at weekends when families come to bathe and picnic. For less crowded swimming, a small lagoon at the point where the river meets the sea is ideal for children; a lifeguard patrols the beach from 10.30am to 3.30pm at weekends. For **food**, try the stall in the beach car park which sells great roti and pholouri at weekends.

On the main road opposite the beach turn-off is the clearly signposted trail to the **Rio Seco Waterfall**, the route to one of the country's most spectacular falls (known locally as Salybia Waterfall). You can drive up a paved road for ten minutes and park by the caretaker's house on the left, just before the tarmac ends – the house is marked by a couple of green-painted benches and a sign giving information on the Matura Forest. Past the house, the path is easy to follow, with signposts at the few junctions. After twenty minutes' walk, the path reaches the river, and you can scramble down to the water to bathe in one of the many deep swimming pools. After crossing a river tributary and meandering through some gorgeous mature forest, the trail enters its final steep stretch, and you get a good prospect of the waterfall and its wide, deep pool of turquoise water. The waterfall itself tumbles some 8m down the rocks, with plenty of handholds and a rope for an easy climb up and a dive from the top, while the break in the canopy above the pool means that it's bathed in sunshine most of the day.

From the road, the walk takes about an hour, and the falls make a great picnic spot. If you prefer to tackle the trail with a **guide** (though it's easily followed without one), see the list on p.141; a particularly good option is with Arima-based Ivan Charles, who combines Rio Seco with a visit to the impressive Tamana bat caves in Central Trinidad.

Balandra and Cumana

After cutting inland across some wild and undeveloped bush, the Toco Road rejoins the coast at **BALANDRA**, a pretty fishing village with a popular **beach**, the entrance to which is at the western end of the village, marked by a small sign. You should be able to find a space in the car park unless you visit at a weekend, when cars line the path to the road. Backed by the fishing village and fringed by palm trees and Indian almonds, the beach is wide and inviting, with clean yellow sand and moderate waves. Most of the weekend crowds swim by the sheltered walled area past the car park, though swimming is safe along the whole length of the beach – a rudimentary shower is located behind the fishing depot. A short trek inland brings you to some lovely deep swimming spots known as **Balandra Pools** and **Cirra Falls**. From a backroad which strikes off the Toco Road just past the sign announcing the village, a trail leads inland, crossing a stream and winding uphill. You pass a rather grand wooden house on the right and after a ten-minute walk come to a river, where crazy paving leads to the cascade. The waterfall is small but attractive, with a deep, greenery-wreathed pool and a tree stump which forms a diving board. You can climb up the bank to the top of the falls, where there's another, smaller cascade. If you're interested in exploring ask at *Cocoa Pod* guesthouse (below) or contact **tour guide** Ivan Charles (see p.141).

Balandra flows imperceptibly into **Rampanalgas**, which trails into the hills on the landward side of the road. It's a friendly sort of place – the local hot spot is *Arthur's,* which boasts a grocery, internet café, bar with pool table, a postal agency and a small but reliable internet service. For **food**, an excellent small shack by the grocery (at the 18-mile marker), *Jenny's Country Kitchen* (☎351 0234) serves a fantastic range of Creole lunches, including curry crab and dumpling, stew pork, callaloo, provision and, unusually, crayfish.

Three kilometres past Rampanalgas the Toco Road goes uphill to **Guayamara Point**, a jut in the headland whose wooden benches are perfect for a picnic or to admire fantastic views stretching south to Matura and Manzanilla. The next village, another 4km north, is **CUMANA**, once the focal point for missionary work in the area. Though still maintaining a number of churches, the village also has the last **petrol station** (Mon–Sat 8.30am–6pm, Sun 8.30am–noon) on this road before Toco, and the last **ATM**. There are a couple of noisy but friendly **bars** in the village, and *Rose's* on the western outskirts is a good option for food, selling all kinds of snacks including roti and saltfish and bake.

Accommodation

Though much beachfront land has been bought up for villa development by Trinidad's elite, foreign tourists are still few and far between, most preferring to continue on to Grand Riviere. **Accommodation** here is therefore still low-key, with good opportunities to get to know local people. The best choice is *Cocoa Pod* (51 William St, Rampanalgas Village Ⓣ670 3521 or 756 1196; ②–③, breakfast included) easily found by turning off the Toco Road by *Arthur's*; it's the second turning on the right. Owned by friendly Aripo cocoa farmer Annette Mills, this family home has cocoa-farming oddments scattered throughout. The four twin and double rooms are decorated around different themes with murals and bedspreads to match – all have private bathrooms, and most have balcony and TV. Outside, plentiful hanging baskets and hibiscus plants attract hummingbirds in numbers.

An even more budget-conscious option is the *Agro-Tourism Centre* (Anglais Rd, Cumana Ⓣ670 3687, Ⓔatctourism@gmail.com; ①–③), which has eight simple, comfortable rooms, each with two to four beds and shared bathrooms – some with air conditioning and balcony – as well as dormitories; the bargain rates include breakfast. The centre is a project of the Toco Foundation, and there are weekly seminars on organic farming; guides are trained for turtle tours and forest hikes, and all agricultural produce is used on site or sold to the local community. To find the centre, turn off the main road just before the petrol station onto Anglais Road, continue through the village for about 1.5km, and turn right at the football ground – the centre is on the left.

Toco and Galera Point

A few kilometres north of Cumana sits the largest community along this stretch of coast. **TOCO** is an attractive, quiet fishing village with a distinctly antiquated air. This proud, close-knit community has one of the largest concentrations of Baptists in the Caribbean, which helped inspire one of its sons, the great Trinidadian writer Earl Lovelace, to write *The Wine of Astonishment*, a novel about Baptist persecution under colonial rule (see "Books", p.293). Most of the buildings are dilapidated gingerbreads made of weather-beaten wood. Though most residents make their money from fishing or farming, much family land has been sold off to developers, tempted by high real-estate prices for the proposed **ferry terminal** here to serve Tobago, a mere 20km away and easily visible on clear days. The plan would entail oil-bunkering and port facilities, but local protest has shelved it for now (see Ⓦwww.toco.interconnection.org/index.htm).

As you enter the town, **Galera Road** strikes off to the right; this is where Radio Toco (106.7FM) is based, a local landmark and an integral part of island life. The road continues past the Toco Composite School, site of the **Toco Folk Museum** (8am–3.30pm or ring to make appointment; Ⓣ670 8261; TT$5 adults, TT$3 children). Started as a school project, this small museum houses Amerindian artefacts, local shells, snakeskins, butterflies and insects, and household items, including a gramophone and some rare 78rpm calypso records, which can be played if requested. The curators, mainly schoolteachers, are an excellent source of local history. The road continues to a good **beach**: a gorgeous double horseshoe of yellow sand scattered with white fragments of finger coral, it's a popular weekend spot for a cook-out – fried fish, soft drinks and local sweets are sold from a thatch-roofed stall. Surfers skim along beyond the reef, but the water close to the shore is translucent and pretty calm.

Galera road meanders onward to **Galera Point**, Trinidad's extreme eastern tip and site of the Galera **lighthouse**. A stocky tower built in 1897, the lighthouse flashes its red beacon over a treacherous stretch of sea known to fishermen as the "graveyard". The keeper may let you climb all 83 rickety steps to the top for a fantastic view over the coconut estates down the coast. Below the lighthouse is a windblown, rocky bluff – known as Fishing Rock – pounded by crashing waves that send up mists of salty spray; a blowhole under the rocks gives off occasional moans, and the point where the royal blue Caribbean Sea meets the murky, pastel blue Atlantic Ocean is easily visible far out to sea. Local people maintain that the point is haunted, with tales of car doors slamming when there is no car, and ghostly wails in the still of the night. The tales spring from an incident that occurred during a 1699 **rebellion** at a Spanish *encomienda* in San Rafael in which Amerindians killed three Capuchin monks. Incensed, Spanish forces pursued the culprits to Galera, where they leapt off the cliffs to their deaths rather than be killed by their slave-masters.

Practicalities

Most of the **maxis and taxis** from Sangre Grande turn around at Toco; you might have to wait a while if you're going on to Grande Riviere – or hitch a lift. There are a couple of charming **places to stay** in Toco, and with the beach nearby, it's a good place to pass a night or two. Catering mostly to surfers and school and student groups – and the cheapest place to stay in all of Trinidad and Tobago – is 🏃 *Sea Sands Camp* (29 mile marker, Paria Main Rd, Toco; Ⓣ670 8356; ①, including all meals). Set up by energetic local Patricia "Aunty Patsy" Bravo, this remarkable communal dormitory and dining room is undeniably basic, but also friendly and relaxed. Patsy is a mine of information on the health-giving properties of plants, and she serves delicious, nutritious meals three times daily – such as barbecued fish with breadfruit puff and pumpkin bread – as well as sea moss smoothies.

For more upmarket accommodation, try the excellent 🏃 *Almond Park Estate* (Humbug Crown Trace, Toco; Ⓣ670 2580 or 681 2037, Ⓦwww.jammevbeachresorts.com; ③–④), owned by Soca superstar Machel Montano and managed by his father, Monty. Located a ten-minute walk from Toco's beach in its own valley complete with hundreds of fruit trees, the estate buildings consist of an eight-bedroom main house perched on the hillside (rented individually or as two four-bed apartments), and a brightly painted, rootsy and secluded hardwood cabin. The main house has a swimming pool, gazebo with hammocks, a "gallery" with pool table, shared kitchen, TV and internet, as well as a home winery attached – Tocovino is brewed from estate cashews, almonds and other fruits. The bedrooms are decorated in deep colours with matching chequered bedspreads; all have polished wooden floors and fans and some have huge beanbags. The breezy cabin offers an open veranda with hammocks, an outdoor toilet and shower, powered by solar energy.

Back in the centre of the village, *Toco Treasure* (Ⓣ670 3341 or 670 8252; ②–③) is a large yellow guesthouse at the side of the main road with a friendly owner and three comfortable apartments, each with two bedrooms, kitchenette, fan and TV. Close by, *Annifar's Snack Bar* serves good local **food** at bargain prices. If you're staying for a few days, watch out for Toco's "Under the Sapodilla Tree Lime", a long-standing local party.

Westwards: the Paria Main Road

The Toco Main Road becomes **Paria Main Road** as it turns west onto the north coast, running perilously close to the cliffs and making for a beautiful, if heart-stopping, drive. You quickly enter the community of **Mission**, where Mervyn Dillon Street honours the locally born West Indies cricketer – and no doubt inspires the village's children who play cricket in the road. Further west is the tiny village of **L'Anse Noire**, with a small but safe beach. Beach house rentals are advertised by weather-worn signs along this stretch of road.

There are several relatively safe beaches at the next village, **Sans Souci**, all boasting waves large enough to make this the island's **surfing** capital and a regular venue for competitions – as well as for egg-laying leatherbacks in season. One of the biggest annual events, staged in late October or early November, is the International Adventure Festival (☎622 8826, Ⓦwww.pariasprings.com), with mountain biking, surfing and hashing competitions. From here you can see Tobago on a clear day (or its lights at night). A couple of places serve great Creole food, making it a good stop-off. Past the bay, Paria Main Road winds inland through impossibly lush rainforest which lets up only at tiny **Monte Video** village, notable for the cold beers on sale at its lone bar.

Grande Riviere

One of Trinidad's most appealing villages, **GRANDE RIVIERE** is where the rainforests of the Northern Range tumble onto deserted beaches lapped by impossibly blue waters. Nicknamed "beyond God's back", Grande Riviere is the only community on this coastline which has any kind of tourist infrastructure. The beautiful *Mount Plaisir Estate* hotel (see opposite), right on the beach, has spurred a host of local residents and international entrepreneurs to open up other hotels and **guesthouses**, but the remote location has kept development low-key and the village remains unspoilt and idyllic. Interaction between visitors and local people has none of the money-oriented duplicity of resorts elsewhere, and local people tend to be welcoming, often throwing parties for guests who are leaving. The main hotels do airport and Port of Spain pick-ups; otherwise **maxis** and **taxis** are available (see p.120).

Grande Riviere guides and tours

Most guides in the village work through the **Grande Riviere Nature Tour Guide Association** (☎670 4257), housed in a **Visitor Information Centre** at the centre of the village. In turtle-nesting season you buy your permit to enter the beach after dark here (TT$70), and then a guide will come and get you at your hotel when there are turtles on the beach. Guides are available here for other trips: by pirogue to Tacaribe or Paria beach and waterfall (TT$700); hiking on nature trails or up a river gorge near Monte Video village through abandoned cocoa and coffee plantations (TT$120); fishing (TT$150 for 1hr 30min) trips; or sailing to Tobago (TT$1000). Another guide is Cyril James (see *Le Grande Almandier*, see below) who organizes a night's **camping** in the bush (including building a treehouse if desired). Local character Jakatan (☎344 5542), the originator of the "**Earth People**", a loose Rasta-esque family who promote the natural life, also takes groups to "Jakatan Falls", a waterfall that he "discovered". Jakatan is an excellent source of information on local folklore and together with his wife designs natural bamboo Carnival costumes for their own small mas band. His tours cost around TT$100 per person; ask for him on the beach. The hotels can also help organize tours, including **snorkelling** trips to nearby Langosta Cove and **boat trips** as far away as Blanchisseuse.

Accommodation

Grande Riviere boasts **accommodation** options to suit all budgets, ensuring that tourism remains community-based; almost all options attract as many Trinidadians as foreigners. These places are particularly good value for families or groups. Whole houses are rented out by Albert Nixon, at the western end of the village (ⓣ670 8209).

Acajou Hotel Paria Main Rd ⓣ670 3771, ⓦwww.acajoutrinidad.com. Six luxurious and well-ventilated hardwood cabañas are located in a lush garden on the river, 50m from the beach. Each comes with ceiling fan, mosquito net, sundeck with hammock, four-poster bed and stone wash basin; two are family cabañas with a ceiling platform for children. Rates include continental breakfast at Acajou's wooden terrace restaurant, which is also open to non-residents and serves a good mix of Caribbean and French food. ⑤–⑥

Le Grande Almandier Paria Main Rd ⓣ670 1013, ⓦwww.legrandealmandier.com. The comfortable, pleasant rooms of this attractive and friendly hotel, situated off a large sea-facing sundeck right on the beach, can sleep from two to six people, have a fan, a/c, en-suite bathroom and veranda, and rates include a breakfast of coconut bread and fresh fruit. The lovely beachfront bar/restaurant downstairs is a popular place, serving contemporary Creole-French cuisine. Discounts in slow season. ⑤

McEachnie's Haven Bristol and Thomas sts ⓣ670 1014 or 642 0477, ⓦwww.mchaventnt.com. This yellow guesthouse perched on the hillside provides clean, homely rooms sleeping up to five, with a/c, fans, mosquito nets and en-suite bathroom. *McHaven* is run by a multitalented family: the owner, Ingrid, cooks delicious, inexpensive meals, such as chicken in coconut and ginger sauce. Her husband Eric is "Roots" of the local band Roots and Branches, which started the careers of many famous local musicians, and their children are all tour guides. ③

Mount Plaisir Estate Paria Main Rd ⓣ670 8381 or 670 2217, ⓦwww.mtplaisir.com. Easy-going, eco-friendly and located right on the beach, this hotel oozes rustic class rather than straightforward luxury; en-suite rooms are fitted with locally made furniture (beds are extremely comfortable), while beautiful paintings hang on the walls and surfaces are decorated with driftwood oddities. Rooms sleep between three and six people; more modern ones have king-size bed and a/c, but those with fan and stable door have much more charm. The owner also has an organic farm which supplies the good hotel restaurant. Deals/rates for backpackers are sometimes available. ⑥

Windchimes Thomas St ⓣ670 1894 or 351 6240. A purple house just above *McHaven* and the most basic of Grande Riviere's accommodations; this is a good budget option with four rooms, two shared bathrooms with hot water and a shared kitchen. ①–②

The beach

Named after the wide, fast-flowing river which originates deep in the Northern Range and runs down to the sea at the eastern end of town, Grande Riviere also boasts a superlative **beach**, a gentle curve of coarse sand with a few unobtrusive buildings. Tall headlands border the sand to the east, where you can take a freshwater bath in the river, while a good kilometre away, the western end is sealed by rocky outcrops. Strong waves provide an invigorating swim, and give **leatherback turtles** the extra push they need to haul themselves up the sand at laying time; Oxbill and Olive Ridley turtles also nest here. As in Matura, the beach is a protected area between March 1 and August 31, and you'll need a permit to enter between dusk and dawn, available from the tour guide association (see box opposite). In the peak turtle season in May, as many as 300 per night visit the beach here, making Grande Riviere among the world's top beaches for turtle nesting.

The liveliest part of the beach centres around the *Mount Plaisir* and *Grande Almandier* hotels, where their **bars** are favourite liming spots and a lovely stall on the beach sells fine calabash art and locally made jewellery. Most people who stay in town divide their time between the beach and the interior, where there are hosts of **waterfalls** and **river walks** as well as excellent **birdwatching** – the rare **piping guan** or pawi, a kind of wild turkey that has died out in more developed areas, is quite common here. Other activities include horseriding – ask at the hotels – snorkelling, kayak surfing and boat trips.

Eating and drinking

All of the top three hotels serve imaginative international cuisine: *Ylang Ylang* **restaurant** at *Mount Plaisir* (daily 8am–10pm) is rated highly, with a menu printed on paper handmade in local schools, local Creole cuisine with Indian and Italian dishes, an extensive wine list and vegetarian options. Breakfast and lunch are available, and three-course dinners cost TT$120–165. The restaurant at *Acajou* serves inventive Creole-French food, such as scallops in wine and shallots (TT$150) or striploin with cognac and creamy pepper sauce (TT$160). *Le Grande Almandier* is an excellent spot for lunch, dishing up burgers, sandwiches and crab and dumpling' from TT$30–50, and a good choice of Trinidadian dishes like corn chowder and fresh seafood in the evening (TT$75 upwards). For great local food, phone in advance to *McHaven* (see above). *Pinky's Cookshop* on the main street serves fast food and basic Creole dishes on the main street.

Aside from the hotel bars, *Guy's Rec Club* and the *Lagoon Bar* make friendly **drinking** spots on the main road; apart from the strains of Roots and Branches, the local band, whose frequent sessions echo over the village from the rehearsal hall on top of a hill above *Guy's*, things are quiet in the evening.

On to Matelot

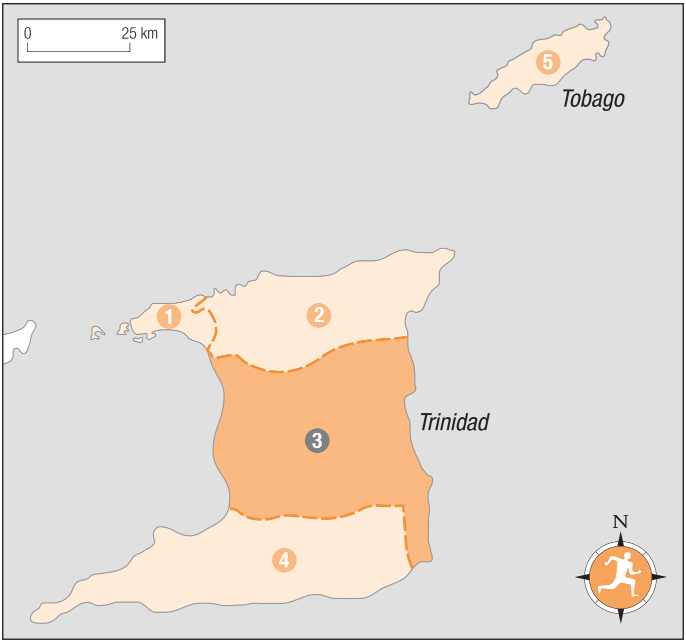
Of the many plank-lined bridges that pepper the Paria Main Road past Grande Riviere, the one crossing **Shark River** is the largest. A popular swimming spot, the river has a couple of deep **pools** from the sea all the way upstream; during holiday weekends, campers pitch tents along its banks. Walking upriver makes a great excursion, though you have to clamber over some mighty rocks to reach the best pools. You'll probably need a guide to negotiate several tributaries and the occasional swing off into the bush (contact the the Pawi Sports Culture & Eco Club; ⓣ337 3458).

Beyond the river, a ten-minute scenic drive takes you to fishing hamlet **MATELOT**, the last settlement on the road. There's not much to keep you here; a track leads down to the fishermen's beach, houses meander up the hillsides, while swimming is possible in the **Matelot River** – follow the main road to the left and bear right. The adjacent football field sees plenty of action at dusk, and in one corner a large TDC sign points the way to the Madamas River Nature Walk, the start of a wild and undeveloped coast bench trail to Blanchisseuse, 19km to the west. Locals have formed the Pawi Sports Culture & Eco Club, a group of licensed **tour guides** who can take you into the forest interior, to the Paria and Matelot waterfalls and the undeveloped beaches of the north coast; like their counterparts in Matura, they are part of the monitoring and protection programme for leatherback turtles. Basic rooms are available in the village – ask Renwick Roberts (below) for more information. There are **no restaurants** here, but Mr James, who runs the grocery shop opposite the church, prepares good local **meals**.

For **transport**, see p.120. Local fishermen can usually be persuaded to take you along the north coast to Paria, Madamas or Blanchisseuse; a round trip takes four to six hours (around TT$700 per boat for the whole stretch); ask at the fishing depot. The forest inland of Matelot is riddled with hunters' trails, including a half-day trek to 3m **Matelot Waterfall**, with its wide, deep pool. A guide is essential; contact Renwick "Pawi Boy" Roberts at the Pawi Sport Culture & Eco Club (ⓣ337 3458, ⓔpawi_renwick@hotmail.com), or ask around in the village.

3

Central Trinidad and the east coast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CHAPTER 3

Highlights

✱ **Carapichaima** Waterloo Temple in the Sea, the gigantic statue of monkey-god Hanuman and the Indian Caribbean Museum provide an impressive insight into Trinidad's Indian culture **See p.163**

✱ **Bat and birdwatching** Witness the awesome exodus of over a million bats from the Tamana caves or the mass roost of scarlet ibis at the Caroni swamp, both occurring at dusk in magnificent surroundings. **See p.170 & p.160**

✱ **Sunrise at Aripo Savannahs** Take in a dramatic light show through moriche palm trees and a fantastic range of birdlife at this most atmospheric of Trinidadian landscapes. **See p.171**

✱ **The Cocal** Where else in the touristy Caribbean could you find twenty-four unbroken kilometres of sand flanked by nothing more obtrusive than coconut trees swaying in the breeze? **See p.174**

✱ **Nariva swamp** A kayak is the ideal way to explore this important wetland area, where a freshwater ecosystem supports a vast array of wildlife. **See p.175**

▲ Waterloo Temple

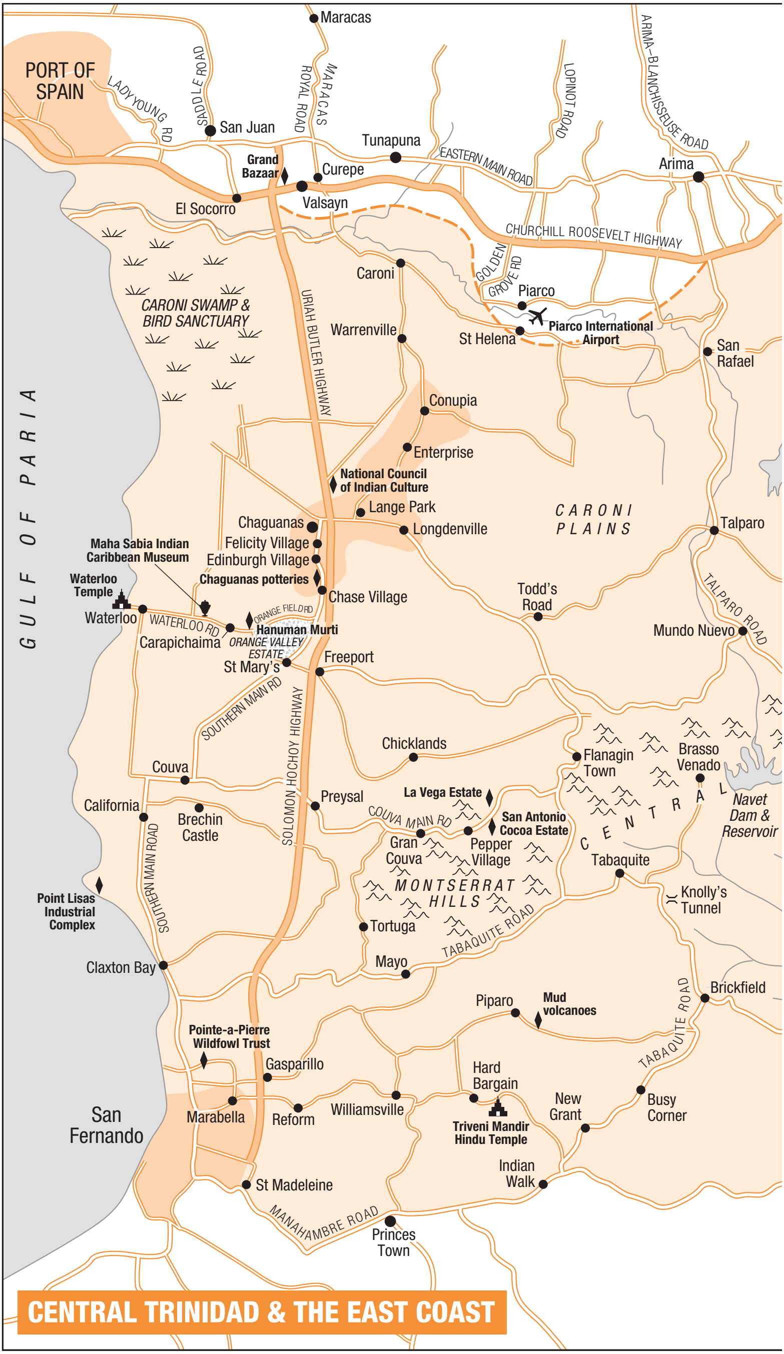
3

Central Trinidad and the east coast

Central Trinidad encompasses a fantastic variety of landscapes. Alongside the brash commercial centre of **Chaguanas**, the gritty, industrialized west coast holds unexpected natural oases such as the **Caroni swamp**, home of the scarlet ibis, while the peaceful pools of **Point-a-Pierre Wildfowl Trust** to the south boast an unlikely location within a huge oil refinery. Dotted with the somnolent villages that characterize Trinidad's centre, an overwhelmingly rural area where many still make their living from the land, the flatlands of the **Caroni Plains** rise gently to the wooded **Central Range** and **Montserrat Hills** to the south, and are bordered to the east by the remarkable **Aripo Savannahs**, a beautiful protected area and prime birdwatching spot. There's more excellent birdwatching along the banks of the **Caroni Arena** reservoir **Navet dam**, while the **Tamana caves** make for an awesome spectacle at dusk, when millions of bats fly out to feed. The chaotic market centre of **Sangre Grande** is the gateway to the east coast, where the road runs parallel to the sea for some 46km and offers a spectacular drive past the stunning **Manzanilla Beach**, where avenues of palms form a coastal barrier that protects the starkly beautiful **Nariva swamp**, and on to drowsy Mayaro, a popular local getaway with another spectacular undeveloped beach.

Central Trinidad's population is mostly descended from the Indian indentured labourers who arrived in Trinidad during the 1840s following the abolition of slavery, and today this heritage is very much in evidence. Hindu shrines and prayer flags adorn front gardens, and ornate temples are ten-a-penny, but the **Waterloo Temple**, sitting on the brown waters of the Gulf of Paria south of Chaguanas, is particularly stunning, as is the towering **Hanuman Murti** statue. Both are given some context by the nearby **Indian Caribbean Museum** at Carapaichima, which provides a fascinating insight into Indo-Trinidadian history and culture.

Transport is no problem along the west coast; its towns are easily accessible from the **Uriah Butler** and **Solomon Hochoy highways**, which run from Port of Spain to Chaguanas and Chaguanas to San Fernando respectively, as well as the parallel Southern Main Road. The rural areas further inland can be a problem, though. **Maxis** and **taxis** take long, circular routes to the villages – and though renting a car is the easiest way to see the area, the absence of road signs can be frustrating; asking for directions is usually your best bet for finding the right road.


CENTRAL TRINIDAD & THE EAST COAST
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LADY YOUNG RD
SADDLE ROAD
San Juan
ROYAL ROAD
MARACAS
Tunapuna
LOPINOT ROAD
ARIMA–BLANCHISSEUSE ROAD
Grand Bazaar
Curepe
EASTERN MAIN ROAD
Arima
El Socorro
Valsayn
CHURCHILL ROOSEVELT HIGHWAY
Caroni
GOLDEN GROVE RD
Piarco
CARONI SWAMP & BIRD SANCTUARY
URIAH BUTLER HIGHWAY
Warrenville
Piarco International Airport
St Helena
San Rafael
Conupia
Enterprise
GULF OF PARIA
National Council of Indian Culture
Lange Park
CARONI PLAINS
Chaguanas
Longdenville
Talparo
Maha Sabia Indian Caribbean Museum
Felicity Village
Edinburgh Village
Waterloo Temple
Chaguanas potteries
Chase Village
Todd's Road
Waterloo
ORANGE FIELD RD
TALPARO ROAD
WATERLOO RD
Hanuman Murti
Mundo Nuevo
Carapichaima
ORANGE VALLEY ESTATE
St Mary's
Freeport
SOUTHERN MAIN RD
SOLOMON HOCHOY HIGHWAY
Chicklands
Flanagin Town
Brasso Venado
Couva
Preysal
La Vega Estate
California
Brechin Castle
COUVA MAIN RD
San Antonio Cocoa Estate
CENTRAL
Navet Dam & Reservoir
Gran Couva
Pepper Village
Tabaquite
SOUTHERN MAIN ROAD
MONTSERRAT HILLS
Knolly's Tunnel
Point Lisas Industrial Complex
Tortuga
TABAQUITE ROAD
Claxton Bay
Mayo
Brickfield
Piparo
Mud volcanoes
TABAQUITE ROAD
Pointe-a-Pierre Wildfowl Trust
Gasparillo
Hard Bargain
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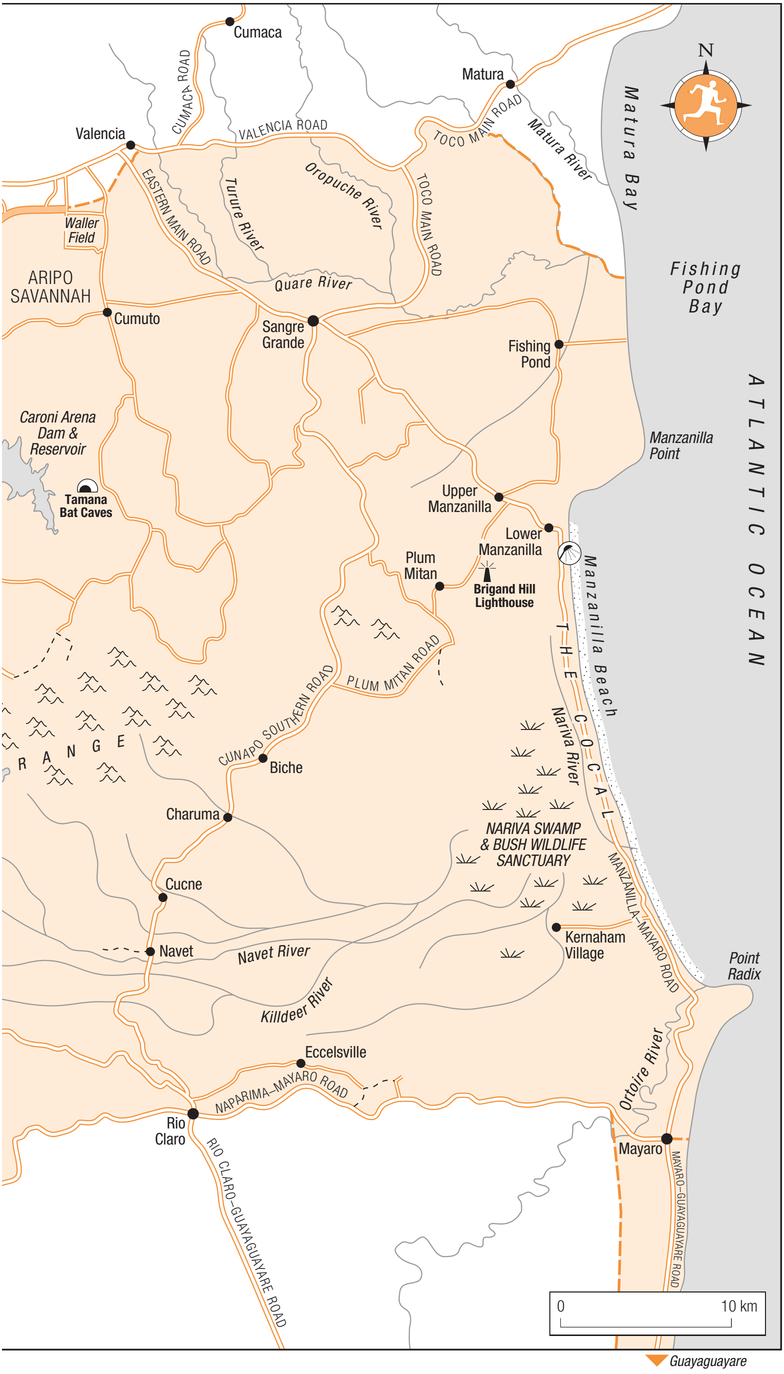
Busy Corner
Triveni Mandir Hindu Temple
Indian Walk
St Madeleine
MANAHAMBRE ROAD
Princes Town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Quare River
Fishing Pond Bay
Cumuto
Sangre Grande
Fishing Pond
ATLANTIC OCEAN
Caroni Arena Dam & Reservoir
Manzanilla Point
Tamana Bat Caves
Upper Manzanilla
Lower Manzanilla
Plum Mitan
Brigand Hill Lighthouse
Manzanilla Beach
PLUM MITAN ROAD
THE COCAL
CUNAPO SOUTHERN ROAD
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Point Radix
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Accommodation in untouristy "Central" is minimal; there are a few options on the west coast geared towards business travellers, but this isn't a particularly enticing place to stay, and it's far better to base yourself in Port of Spain or San Fernando and see the area on day-trips. The only exception is Mayaro, where a string of beach houses and hotels offer the opportunity of some Trini-style beachtime. As for **eating**, there are innumerable hole-in-the wall places selling delicious roti and Creole food, while doubles and other Indian snacks are also easy to find, as are fast-food joints, Chinese takeaways and, of course, **rum shops**.

Caroni Swamp and Bird Sanctuary

A few kilometres south of the East–West Corridor along the Uriah Butler Highway, **Caroni Swamp and Bird Sanctuary** is one of Trinidad's most heavily promoted environmental attractions. The main roosting place for the elegant and spectacularly red **scarlet ibis**, T&T's national bird, these forty square kilometres of tidal lagoons, marshland and mangrove forest bordering the Gulf of Paria between the mouths of the Caroni and Madame Espagnole rivers are home to 157 species of birds, including egrets and blue herons, while caimans, snakes, opossums, racoons and silky anteaters live in the water and the surrounding mangroves. Rich in fish and oysters, the swamp is also a spawning ground for massive tarpon and groupers (the largest caught here weighed 250lb). It was designated a protected wildlife area in 1953, but poaching still occurs, and industrial waste pollution remains a problem. Nonetheless, it's a mysteriously beautiful place, and is well worth a visit.

Boat tours of the swamp are led by guides who point out birds, plants and animals of interest as you chug through a maze of channels through the mangroves, which themselves have an otherworldly appearance: some have twisted aerial roots growing downwards into the water, while others have roots that grow upwards, emerging from the murky depths like stalagmites. The **scarlet ibis** roost on mangrove islands in the middle of open lagoons. Once the boat engines shudder to a halt, a spectacular scene unfolds as thousands of birds flock in, gradually turning their preferred clump of trees a vibrant red. This intense plumage owes its pigment to carotene, derived from the bird's main prey – shrimp, worms and fiddler and tree-climbing crabs. In April and May, breeding pairs construct flat, open nests in the mangroves; once laid, their eggs incubate for just under a month before all-black hatchlings emerge – it takes up to three years for their diet to replace the dark feathers with a brilliant crimson.

Tours leave daily at 4pm from the assembly point in the car park and last two and half hours; advance booking advisable. Of the two operators, **Nanan's** (Ⓣ645 1305, Ⓦwww.nananecotours.com; TT$60) is the larger, a professional outfit whose numerous boats often carry up to thirty people; **Madoo's** tours (Ⓣ663 0458 or 737 2069, Ⓦwww.madoobirdtours.com; TT$90) are more personalized, with smaller groups, and better for serious birders. Whichever operator you choose, try to sit at the front of the boat to avoid engine noise and fumes, and always douse yourself in plenty of repellent to prevent mosquito bites. Also, it's a good idea to bring binoculars or a powerful zoom lens, as it's not possible to get close to the roosting spots without disturbing the ibis. An excellent alternative to the standard trip are the **kayak tours** offered by Paria Springs (see p.41), which start from the southern side of the swamp and paddle through a narrow channel to the roosting site; the lack of engines allows for much better wildlife viewing.

Driving to the swamp from Port of Spain, you'll need to leave at around 2.30pm to catch the 4pm tour, as rush-hour traffic can be terrible. Take the flyover onto the Uriah Butler Highway, and then the first exit with a bridge over the highway (there's no signpost at the time of writing); cross the highway and follow the signs to the car park. **Maxis** and **route taxis** from Port of Spain to Chaguanas can drop you at the Caroni exit (a five-minute walk to the start of the tour), but you must arrange for a pick-up as it's unsafe to wait on the highway after dark. Aside from an incongruously large car park, **facilities** are limited to toilets, while drinks are sold from coolers in the boats.

Chaguanas and around

The Uriah Butler Highway morphs into the Solomon Hochoy Highway roughly halfway down the west coast at the sprawling settlement of **CHAGUANAS**, one of the island's oldest and largest towns. Taking its name from its original inhabitants (the Chaguanes Amerindian tribe), it was pretty much a one-horse affair until Indian indentured labourers came in the 1840s to work on nearby sugar and cocoa estates. By the 1880s Chaguanas had become the most important **market town** in central Trinidad, connected to Port of Spain by rail lines and steamer ships. As the sugar industry declined in the early twentieth century, many Indians moved into professions such as journalism and the law, creating the middle-class intelligentsia from which **V.S. Naipaul** emerged and which served as the milieu for some of his early novels. Though the trains and steamer are long gone, the construction of the Uriah Butler and Solomon Hochoy highways has ensured that the town remains well connected to the rest of the island, while the 1970s **oil boom** gave Chaguanas a new lease of life; conveniently located near the oil-rich south, it developed into a shopping centre for those who prefer not to travel all the way into Port of Spain, and its swanky Lange Park suburb alongside out-of-town shopping mall Price Plaza attest to the area's growing prosperity.

Ranged around the junction of Chaguanas Main Road and the old Southern Main Road, **central Chaguanas** is a busy amalgam of shops and streetside stalls ranged around three large malls: Mid-Centre, the slightly dilapidated Centre Pointe and Centre City. All are great places to find bargains in shoes and clothes, including imports direct from India. Occupying the narrow alleys stretching back from the southern end of Chaguanas Main Road, the big, old-fashioned **market** is equally absorbing: the pavements are chock-a-block with wooden stalls selling dirt-cheap clothes, ornaments and accessories, while the giant **produce market**, in an industrial-style hangar bedecked with bright red wrought-iron arches, is a feast for the eyes, with wizened stallholders presiding over stands groaning under the weight of plantain, dasheen, peppers, ground provisions and artfully arranged piles of fruit. Main trading days are Friday to Sunday, when the markets and the entire central area buzz with activity.

Just down from the market, past the giant Hindi Credit Union building, the stocky, arch-fronted **Lion House** (Ⓦ www.thelionhouse.com) was the birthplace and childhood home of Trinidad's most celebrated writer, **V.S. Naipaul**, who was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2002. A fine, glaringly white-painted example of classic North Indian architecture, with the eponymous lions adorning stout columns supporting its grand arcade, it was built in 1926 by the Pundit Capildeo, and became the residence of the Naipaul family when the writer's father Seepersad married Capildeo's daughter. Naipaul's 1961 novel *A House for Mr Biswas* describes growing up here surrounded by his stepmother's wealthy, religious and domineering family. Still a private residence, the Lion House is not open to the public, though if you're lucky you'll be able to poke your head around the door to see the ornate interior, its walls decorated with carvings of Hindu deities.

Phagwah

A joyous celebration of the new year and the arrival of spring, the Hindu Holi festival – known in the Caribbean as **Phagwah** (pronounced "pag-wah") – is held around the first full moon in March to mark the end of the Hindu calendar's twelfth month (Phagun). Upbeat and lighthearted – to the horror of more traditional Hindus, who consider this attitude *adharamic* (anti-religious) – Phagwah celebrations are massive outdoor parties that represent a symbolic triumph of light over darkness and happiness over suffering. In Indian religious mythology, the festival commemorates the death of Holika, the sister of evil king Hiranyakashyapu, who repeatedly tried to murder his son Prahalad because of the latter's insistence on worshipping Vishnu as the only God. Immune to flames, Holika carried Prahalad into a fire, but the gods ensured that she burned to death; her brother was later slain by Vishnu. Holika's conflagration is re-enacted the night before the main festivities, when sins amassed in the previous year are ceremonially consumed by the flames of large bonfires.

The main festivities revolve around traditions such as the singing of devotional folk songs called **chowtals**, sung in a mix of English and Hindi and composed specifically for Phagwah to tell the story of the festival, normally accompanied by goatskin *dholak* drums and brass cymbals called *ghanj*. Local businesses sponsor *chowtal* competitions in the weeks preceding Phagwah, and the winners perform on the day itself. The principal focus of the festival, though, are intense dyes of various colours including the fuchsia-pink *abir*, which is strewn about as powder or mixed with water and squirted from a plastic bottle renamed a *pichakaaree*; participants wear white to make the most of the ensuing glorious mess. As the festivities wear on, classical Indian dancers display their movements and chutney soca fuels the more risqué dancing. Games add to the fun; adults participate in **makhan chor**, where teams form a human pyramid in order to grab a suspended flag; and children compete in roti-eating contests in which skins are strung through the middle and tied in a line to be eaten with no hands allowed.

Celebrations tend to begin around 1pm and are held all over Trinidad; foreigners should expect to get very dirty as they're extra special targets for dye throwing. In the north, Aranguez Savannah in San Juan is particularly lively, whereas Tunapuna Hindu School close to the Churchill Roosevelt Highway holds a slightly more restrained event. At Chaguanas, the car park of the National Council for Indian Culture is a popular location, as is the **Kendra Phagwah Festival** in an open space off Longdenville Old Road. Bear in mind none are widely publicized – to find the exact date, you'll have to scan the community events listings in the newspapers, contact a tour guide, or ask around.

Practicalities

Chaguanas **maxis** from City Gate, Port of Spain, drop off next to the Mid Centre Mall as do **route taxis**, which depart from Broadway, Port of Spain, while PTSC buses stop next to *KFC* near the Uriah Butler Highway. Maxis and route taxis to the rest of the west coast depart from the transportation stands at the Mid Centre Mall. As to eating, you won't do much better than the legions of **roti and doubles stalls** all over town, though the malls hold several air-conditioned restaurants serving Creole and Chinese food. Haunt of the Indian elite, the upscale *Kam-Po*, opposite Centre Pointe Mall at 55 Ramsaran St (Mon–Thurs 10.30am–10pm, Fri & Sat 10.30am–11pm; ⓣ665 4558), has a vast and varied menu ranging from steaks to classic Chinese dishes.

Back on the Uriah Butler Highway, the out-of-town shopping mall **Price Plaza** offers yet more air-conditioned comfort for the moneyed classes, with international chain-stores alongside American-style restaurants and fast-food joints, and a MovieTowne (ⓣ627 8277, ⓦmovietowne.com).

Felicity and the Potteries

A couple of kilometres south of Chaguanas centre, on the western side of the highway, the Southern Main Road (known here as the Felicity Main Road) is bordered to the left by acre upon acre of undulating sugar cane. To the right, backstreets lead into **FELICITY VILLAGE**, a thoroughly Indian community where you'll see a mini-temple outside most homes. Come **Diwali**, Felicity residents are particularly lavish with their decorations; thousands of *deyas* (pottery lamps produced for the festival) and strings of fairy lights give off an incredible glow in the evening, and this is one of the best places in Trinidad to take in the celebrations, with *tassa* drummers, Indian dancers and loads of delicious food to sample. Since traffic slows to a standstill during Diwali, it's best to park closer to Chaguanas and walk to Felicity (about fifteen minutes).

Continuing south, the SMR winds through a string of indistinguishable Indian communities; as you pass through the otherwise unremarkable Edinburgh Village, look out for the ornate, white-painted **Edinburgh Temple** on the right, its walls, arches and turrets richly embellished with plaster reliefs and with a colourful shrine to Kali outside. Just past here, the string of stalls lining the road are known collectively as the **Chaguanas Potteries**, the oldest and most famous of which is Benny's Pottery Works (Mon–Sat 8am–5pm, Sun 8am–1pm; ⓣ665 4267), at the back of Radika's Pottery Shop. The thousands of *beautiful* windchimes, wall plaques, pots and ornaments on sale in Radika's are all produced in Benny's workshop using traditional methods passed down from the present owner's grandfather, who learnt his craft in India. The clay is kneaded by foot to remove stones and lumps, then hand-rolled or shaped on a wheel before being fired in the open wood-fuelled kiln at the centre of the workshop.

Carapichaima and Waterloo Village

The collective name for the cluster of villages on and around the SMR south of Edinburgh, **CARAPICHAIMA**, like its neighbours, is home to a predominantly Indian population, whose forefathers settled here to work on the vast sugar estates that once covered the area. For the moment, at least, this is still prime **sugar territory**: fields of cane undulate in the wind and graceful royal palms tower over the road as they have done since the early plantation days, when the land was owned by the Tate and Lyle sugar producers. Present-day Carapichaima is wholeheartedly Trinidadian, however; along the central **Waterloo Main Road**, the Church of Zion and Presbyterian school sit side-by-side with a healthy quota of rum shops, while Hindu prayer flags flutter next to trees strung with blue plastic bottles that traditionally ward off *maljo*, or bad luck. Nowhere else is the creative potential of Trinidad's cosmopolitan cultural mix more clearly visible than at Carapichaima's **Carnival** celebrations, where the length of the main road is lit up with lanterns each night, and a traditional masquerade of robbers, jab jabs and jamettes, combined with Indian drumming and costume, draws hundreds of visitors – check with the museum (see p.165) for more details.

Home to two of Trinidad's most spectacular Hindu sites, the towering **Hanuman statue** and the unique **Temple in the Sea**, Carapichaima also holds an excellent museum on Indian culture and history, while the coastline here offers excellent **birdwatching**, with both Waterloo and nearby Brick Field good places

Indo-Trinidadian religions

T&T's largest religious denomination after Catholicism, **Hinduism** was brought to Trinidad in the nineteenth century by indentured Indian workers, whose wide-ranging geographical and social origins reflected the huge differences in religious practice and status in India. As they settled into their new life in the Caribbean, Indo-Trinidadians created a hybrid Hinduism that's unique to the island. One of the main differences to India is the lack of a **caste system** in T&T. The strong friendships forged during the passage over – which gave rise to the term *jihaji bhai* ("ship brother") – transcended differences in social status, and many new-found friends chose to settle together and work the same plantations. Slowly, the caste system was eroded; only the priestly Brahman caste, whose pundits officiate at religious rites, has survived in Trinidad.

Rituals have also been modified. Prayers for blessing – **pujas** – are lengthy processes in India, each with a specific meaning and directed towards a particular deity, but in Trinidad, several *pujas* are often combined, with multiple deities involved. At sacred places such as Waterloo, you'll often see the scattered remains of articles required for *pujas* – incense, flowers, pictures (*murtis*) of the deity to be honoured, while the smell of the oils, herbs, spices and ghee offered to the gods hang heavy in the air; bamboo poles topped with a **jhandi** (prayer flag) in the colours of the relevant deity are also essential to pujas, and you'll see clusters of them at *puja* sites island-wide as well as fluttering in the gardens of Hindu households.

Though you'd hardly believe it judging by the proliferation of grandiose mosques, **Islam** actually has a much smaller worship base, with just six percent of the population practicing Muslims. For the most part, Islamic religious practice has changed little since arriving in T&T, save for the festival of **Hosay**, which has grown from a rather sombre ceremony to a Carnival-esque affair.

to see skimmers, wattled jacanas, long-winged harriers, ospreys, neotropic cormorants, plovers, ruddy turnstones and the striking red-breasted blackbird. Courtenay Rooks of Paria Springs (see p.141) organizes regular birding tours in the area.

The Hanuman Murti and temple

At **Orange Field**, 200m up from the junction of the Orange Field and Waterloo roads and surrounded by a cluster of neat 1920s bungalows built for sugar estate managers, the majestic **Hanuman Murti** is the largest representation of the Hindu monkey god outside of India, its 26 metres towering over the attached temple and ashram. Consecrated in June 2003, the statue was a gift from Ganapati Sachchidananda, a Swami (spiritual teacher) from Mysore in southern India. Its workmanship rivals anything to be found in Asia, with beautifully detailed colourful relief work courtesy of twenty expert craftsmen sent over from Mysore by the Swami.

In Hindu teaching, Hanuman is an immortal guru who observes your actions and offers protection from wrongdoing; interestingly, literature available at the temple informs that Hanuman came to the rescue against kidnappings in ancient India, a reference to the recent spate of abductions of prominent East Indian business people here in Trinidad. The complex's bright pink **temple** (Mon–Fri 6am–noon & 5–8pm, Sat & Sun 6am–noon & 4–8pm) is both the largest in Trinidad and the only one in the ornate and long, single-storey south Indian style. The temple is attached to the **Sri Dattatreya Ashram** (Ⓦwww.hanumandatta.com), a very active yoga and meditation **centre** (call ⓉT673 5328 for class information), which is surrounded by some superb bas-reliefs of Hindu deities and is located about 100m from the Hanuman. To arrange guided **tours**, contact the President of the Temple, Ramesh Persad Maharaj (Ⓣ689 6581).

The Indian Caribbean Museum

Back on Waterloo Main Road in Waterloo village (some two-thirds of the way down towards the Temple in the Sea), the **Maha Sabha Indian Caribbean Museum** (Wed–Sun 10am–5pm; ☎ 673 7007; free) is the only permanent exhibition of its kind in the Caribbean. Put together with extensive research from both local and expatriate sources, its thoughtful and absorbing collection documents the Indian experience in Trinidad across Hindu, Muslim and Christian religions, something that often gets overlooked in a society whose culture can be dominated

▲ Hanuman Murti, Carapichaima

by the calypso, soca and steel pan of the Afro-Trinidadian population. Exhibits include letters and photographs of early **Indian arrivals** on the island and models of the ships that brought the first immigrants, while sugar is a running theme throughout, with agricultural tools and photos documenting rural life and indentureship, and information on the phasing out of **sugar cane** attesting to the psychological importance of the crop to Indo-Trinidadians. Traditional clothing, paintings and musical instruments are all well represented, as are marijuana pipes – cannabis was originally brought to the Caribbean by Indians, and according to many Hindus it was only outlawed when rum factories were built, so as to promote consumption of the new drug of choice.

Religious festivals and icons form a sizeable part of the collection, from displays on Diwali and Phagwah to tassa drums and photos of early Tadjas from the Muslim Hosay commemoration, as well as a translation of the Bible into Hindi by nineteenth-century Presbyterian missionaries. The construction of Hindu schools from the 1950s holds particular significance, as this is seen as the point at which Hindus began to be accepted into Trinidadian society. The museum's knowledgeable curator is on hand to answer any questions about the exhibits or wider issues.

Waterloo Temple in the Sea

Beyond the museum, Waterloo Main Road meanders for some 2km towards the sea, with some pretty wooden buildings intermingled with the concrete; on the right-hand side, look out for the former railway station, once a stop on the Port of Spain–San Fernando line. Just before you meet the sea, the old Anglican cemetery on the right includes a plot reserved for Muslim burials, and just beyond this, a car park and information board (and, through a hedge, traditional Hindu cremation pyres at the water's edge) mark the site of the unfailingly impressive **Waterloo Temple** (Tues, Wed, Sat & Sun 8am–3pm; though these times depend on when the caretaker arrives). A gleaming white onion-shaped dome, it sits at the end of a concrete causeway surrounded by the Gulf of Paria at high tide, and at low tide by extensive mudflats. It's a stunning setting, inordinately peaceful and spiritual, with the shore littered with broken coconut shells and fruits left by Hindus during *puja* ceremonies, and legions of flags (*jhande*) – representing prayers and offerings – flapping in the breeze.

The octagonal temple – used by the local Hindu community for weddings and *puja* ceremonies – covers an area of over 100 square metres, with coloured glass windows that enable you to see the brightly painted stone and marble gods inside. Anyone can enter the temple, provided they remove their shoes first. The causeway, meanwhile, is a good vantage point from which to view the **birds**, including terns, gulls, whimbrels and skimmers, which feed in the mudflats throughout the year.

Back at the car park, there's also a life-size statue of **Sewdass Sadhu**, an Indian labourer whose zeal and persistence enabled the temple to be built. Sadhu constructed a temple on the shore here in 1947, on land owned by the state sugar monopoly Caroni, but the government bulldozed the structure five years later, and sent him to jail for fourteen days. He then decided to rebuild his temple in the sea, where no permission was required, and struggled single-handedly for the next 25 years, using a bicycle to carry the foundation rocks out into the water and placing barrels full of concrete on the sea floor at low tide. Help finally came in 1995, when the 150th anniversary of the arrival of Indians in Trinidad inspired the government to declare the temple an Unemployment Relief Project (URP). With labourers paid by the state to rebuild the structure, the causeway was added and the temple swiftly completed.

Practicalities

If you have your own transport, Carapichaima is most easily accessed from the **Freeport** exit of the Solomon Hochoy Highway: head west crossing the Southern Main Road at **St Mary's** village (look for the *KFC*); at the next junction, turn right onto Orange Field Road for Hanuman Murti and left for the museum and Waterloo Temple. By **public transport**, take a route taxi from the Mid Centre Mall in Chaguanas to St Mary's Junction on the Southern Main Road just beyond the Orange Field Road turn-off, where you pick up another taxi to the junction of Orange Field and Waterloo roads. Route taxis ply the lengthy Waterloo Road from Orange Field to Waterloo Temple. In terms of **eating**, you can pick up a roti or some Creole food at one of the many diners lining Waterloo Main Road.

The industrial coast and the Point-a-Pierre Wildfowl Trust

South of Carapichaima, the SMR enters Trinidad's industrial heartland, with the west coast lined by a series of smoggy towns interspersed with oil refineries and petrochemical plants. The liveliest town in the area is **COUVA**, with a few lovely gingerbread houses surviving among the concrete, and several places to eat and drink, including the *Bamboo* restaurant, 48 Southern Main Rd, which serves conch and duck alongside standard roti fare. Just south of Couva, a roundabout marks the turn-off to the massive **Point Lisas Industrial Complex**, whose belching chimneys are visible from miles around. The complex was built during the oil boom years of the 1970s to produce liquefied natural gas, steel and fertilizers (it has the unfortunate distinction of being the largest exporter of fertilizer in the world), but, industrial as it is, Point Lisas still has its wildlife. Every year between December and June, thousands of **blue crabs** make the hazardous journey across the main road from the swampland beside the complex to lay eggs in the sea; given the road traffic here, many don't make it, leaving a crunchy trail of shells on the tarmac. Just by the turn-off, **Atlantic Plaza** offers air-conditioned respite from the heat in the form of a *Rituals* coffee shop and food court.

The main reason to linger in this area, is to visit the remarkable **Point-a-Pierre Wildfowl Trust** (Mon–Fri 8am–5pm, Sat & Sun 10am–5pm; TT$10; ☎658 4200 ext 2512; tours 9.30am & 1.30pm, call ahead to arrange), whose greenery-swathed pools occupy a rather bizarre setting in the midst of the huge Petrotrin Oil Refinery at Point-a-Pierre, just north of San Fernando. The reserve came into being in 1966, when a hunter who worked at the refinery realized that wildfowl stocks were diminishing, and set aside an area within the complex to breed the birds. In time it became an established reserve, supported financially by the Canadian and British governments as well as by Shell – though barely at all by Petrotrin itself. Today, the reserve's attractively landscaped grounds surround two lakes filled with lotus and water lilies and bordered by wooden walkways. Many **rare bird species** can be seen here, including the wild Muscovy duck, the red-billed whistling duck, the white-cheeked pintail and red-capped cardinal. Notwithstanding the fact that some of the rarer birds, including scarlet ibis, are caged within an aviary to allow breeding programmes to continue, the reserve doesn't feel at all like a zoo. Indeed, the ibis breeding programme has been something of a landmark project, particularly as some of the released birds have chosen to stay on the site, allowing you the only chance you'll get in Trinidad to see wild scarlet ibis up close. (For details on visiting Caroni swamp, home of the scarlet ibis, see p.160.) The **learning centre** at the entrance has good photographic displays of the reserve's flora and fauna, plus a small collection of shells and insect specimens alongside Amerindian artefacts, with a very informative account of the culture and belief systems of Trinidad's original inhabitants. The trust's guides are vastly knowledgeable not only about the birdlife, but also the medicinal qualities of Trinidad's indigenous plants, and though you can explore the reserve independently, you'll get a lot more from your visit if you arrange for a tour.

Practicalities

To **drive** to Point-a-Pierre from Port of Spain or San Fernando, leave the Solomon Hochoy Highway at the Gasparillo–Point-a-Pierre exit and follow the signs west through the Petrotrin Oil Refinery; otherwise the turning is signposted from the SMR. On **public transport**, the Chaguanas–Couva–San Fernando maxi route passes in front of the refinery. Of the multiple entrances to the refinery, the one closest to the reserve is between oil drums 84 and 85, on the left-hand side of the SMR if coming from the north. Once inside, turn left on Regent Road; it's a twenty-minute walk or five-minute drive to the Trust entrance. The best time to visit is before 11am or after 3pm, as the animals hide in the shade during the hottest part of the day.

The most appealing **accommodation** choice by far in the area is the *Petrea Place Guesthouse* (☎658 5322; ④ including continental breakfast), next to the Wildfowl Trust inside the Petrotrin plant. The large, homely bedrooms (one of which is equipped for people with disabilities) have rug-covered wood floors, air conditioning and TV, while the **restaurant** (advance booking only), offers high-quality Caribbean cuisine alongside afternoon tea with a range of sweets and savouries, served on a veranda surrounded by climbing creepers and petrea flowers.

The Montserrat Hills and around

East of the Solomon Hochoy Highway, the **Montserrat Hills** are the most picturesque part of the Central Range, a rolling landscape which shelters huge cocoa estates and the **Navet Dam and Reservoir**, as well as some of Trinidad's sleepiest villages, accessed via winding roads with rickety wooden bridges. The nineteenth-century English novelist Charles Kingsley, who visited in 1870, described "the panorama from the top of Montserrat" as "the most vast and most lovely which I have ever seen". Most of the villages have little specific to recommend them apart from the odd picturesque colonial house and a great deal of rural charm, though there are a few gentle attractions on which to hinge a visit.

La Vega and San Antonio Estates

A thriving commercial plant nursery with a few recreational activities for visitors as well, the **La Vega Estate** (daily 9am–5pm; free if you've come to shop, TT$15 to picnic and walk the signposted nature trail; ☎679 9522, 🌐www.lavegaestate.com) is nestled in the hills about 10km east of the Solomon Hochoy Highway on the Couva Main Road, between Gran Couva and Flanagin Town. A large swathe of the estate is devoted to exquisitely **landscaped gardens**, which you can explore independently or on a guided tour (TT$25); there are also ponds for **fishing** (TT$20) and **paddle-boating** (TT$40 for 30min; public holidays only), as well as **mountain-biking** trails and rental (TT$50 for 30min), picnic tables in sheltered bamboo groves, bromeliad and Japanese gardens, a meditation space and a childrens' play area.

A few kilometres west of La Vega at 619 Couva Main Rd lies the 250-acre **San Antonio Estate** (phone in advance; ⓣ679 9515 or 377 7780, ⓔm_deverteuil@hotmail.com), a working **cocoa plantation** owned and managed by Richard de Verteuil. His family has operated the estate in the traditional manner for hundreds of years, and an hour's tour offers a fascinating glimpse into the workings of this end of the cocoa industry, from the planting and picking of the pods through to the drying process in sheds with sliding roofs, and the storing of the beans for export. Trinidad produces "fine flavour" cocoa, and much of the crop ends up in expensive Belgian chocolate.

Infrequent **route taxis** run along the Couva Main Road from next to the *KFC* at the eastern end of Couva. To get there by **car**, take the Gran Couva exit from the Solomon Hochoy Highway and follow the road past Gran Couva for about twenty minutes.

Navet Dam and Reservoir

With only the minuscule hamlet of Brasso Venado nearby, the towering **Navet Dam** (daily 8am–6pm) is an isolated place, excellent for quiet picnics and birdwatching, with plenty of waterfowl scooting around on the reservoir's intricate network of inlets and coves As with visits to Caroni Arena, you need a **permit** to enter the area, best arranged via Paria Springs Tours (see p.41). The route to the dam, via the Gasparillo exit from Solomon Hochoy Highway along the Tabaquite Road, runs along the southern slopes of the Montserrat Hills. Past the tiny village of Tabaquite, it's worth heading up John William Trace to peer into the abandoned **Knolly's railway tunnel**, named after the colonial Governor who opened it in 1898. The surrounding area has been prettily landscaped, and there are a couple of shady picnic areas.

Piparo

Set in beautiful low-lying hills south of Montserrat, **PIPARO** has the dubious distinction of having suffered one of the Trinidad's largest **mud volcano** eruptions in 1997, which saw mud spewed 60m into the air, covering 2.5 square kilometres and displacing 31 families. Half of the village cemetery remains buried under the (now solidified) mud "lake", which has two small oozing mounds at its centre that occasionally spatter out small eruptions of mud. Piparo is also infamous as the former home of notorious **drug lord**, **Dole Chadee** (see box, p.170), whose 1994 arrest drew attention both to the significance of cocaine as part of the island's economy, and to the extent of his Piparo estate, close to the volcano site, where an extensive mansion and Hindu temple behind 4.5m razor-wired walls attest to the extravagance of the cocaine don's lifestyle. The rest of his land, just north of the village, was seized by the government and now houses a rehabilitation centre for drug users and the homeless.

The village lies about 10km from both Tortuga and Tabaquite, and is a twenty-minute or so drive from the Solomon Hochoy Highway (take the Gasparillo exit, follow the main road and take a left turn at Williamsville; **route taxis** depart from Gasparillo).

Triveni Mandir

Set among the canefields of south-central Trinidad (turn off the highway at the Gasparillo exit), the remarkably large **Triveni Mandir** (ⓣ656 0526, ⓦwww.trivenimandir.com; tours by donation) owes its existence to the vision and devotion of local furniture-seller-cum-Hindu teacher Shri Ramoonsingh, who spent his entire life savings on its construction. It's wonderfully detailed, with huge elephant sculptures outside and solid marble figurines of Shiva, Ganesh and Laksmi

The rise and fall of Dole Chadee

Widely claimed to have been Trinidad's most influential and successful drug lord, **Dole Chadee's** story reads something like an illicit Colombian rags-to-riches tale. Born Nankissoon Boodram to a poor Indo-Trinidadian family in Curepe, Chadee went from mason to cocaine empire-builder, and was a charitable community godfather who skilfully avoided arrest until his eventual downfall, which was shrouded in unanswered questions and political intrigue.

At the peak of his reign, Chadee owned a large estate guarded by gun-wielding henchmen at the village of **Piparo**; he had his own ornate no-expense-spared Hindu temple, owned racehorses, a fleet of flashy cars (despite not having a driving-licence), as well as shopping centres and gas stations as far afield as Princes Town and San Fernando. Chadee employed a large contingent of the Piparo community and was intent on looking after the village's welfare, offering money for food and electricity at difficult times, as well as funds for sporting events and other community activities. His group remained seemingly untouchable (he's even said to have bought a car from former prime minister, Patrick Manning), despite showing a ruthless side which saw witnesses to alleged crimes poisoned, killed or their jaws shot off, and families intimidated or murdered.

Chadee was never tried as a narco-trafficker, however. Despite US authorities' suspicions that he, along with partner "Shortman" Beharry, were heading the eastern Caribbean's leading cocaine cartel, in league with Cali of Colombia, it was for a dual **murder charge** that he and eight accomplices were eventually arrested in 1994. They were found guilty and sentenced to death by hanging in 1996, and a lengthy appeal process ensued; Chadee and the other accused maintained they had no involvement in the murder and were the victims of a witch-hunt for drug traffickers by a range of conspirators. The authorities disagreed, and in 1999, all nine went to the gallows. Though Chadee and his cohorts were certainly no angels, there are inconsistencies over their ultimate demise: regardless of their guilt in the murder charge, the group apparently leapfrogged a long line of murderers waiting on death row; jurors on the case were said to have been cobbled together without due process; and Amnesty International points to the failure of political officials to disclose evidence. Chadee certainly served a purpose as a media tool: the war on drugs was seen to be visibly waged, while Trinidad continued to be flooded with cocaine. Chadee's downfall is also alleged to have been orchestrated by rival Syrian operators with political clout in both T&T's main parties, who didn't like the fact that Chadee's gang were "independent players" operating at the risk side of the business rather than in the cartel they were purported to be part of; certainly, the moneyed side of cocaine trading in Trinidad remains wholeheartedly intertwined with legitimate businesses and political deals.

set in recesses in the walls both inside and out. The stained-glass windows and ornate paintings on the inside walls add to the atmosphere; many were designed by a local Muslim artist. Shri Ramoonsingh died before the temple was completed, but a small plaque at the front of the building dedicates the mandir to him.

The Caroni Plains

Running roughly parallel to the Solomon Hochoy Highway, the old **Southern Main Road** south from Curepe on the Churchill Roosevelt Highway is little more than a parochial thoroughfare these days as it potters through one small community after another surrounded on all sides by the **Caroni Plains**, Trinidad's original sugar heartland and a region dominated by the East Indian community, whose ancestors originally settled here as indentured workers (see p.267). The complete restructuring of the sugar industry during the 1990s and the eventual closure of the state-owned Caroni Sugar Company in 2004 has forced farmers to diversify, however, planting rice, pigeon peas and cassava in the former canefields. Some 5km south of Curepe, **Caroni village** was founded around the old Caroni Sugar Factory, which – as attested by the heavy molasses smell in the air – has been used for **rum** distillation since 1918. Set in the former station of the now defunct train line east to Sangre Grande, the **Railway Bar** is an atmospheric place to sample the produce.

The SMR becomes increasingly urban as you pass through **Warrenville**, home of a particularly attractive mosque, which merges imperceptibly into **Conupia**, itself morphing into a suburb of Chaguanas. The route displays a fascinating combination of old and new Trinidad, with mandirs and mosques interspersed with evangelical churches, while extravagant signboards shout out the wares of the small shops and mom-and-pop restaurants that line the road. Excellent **Indian fast food** can be found at *Indars* at Conupia opposite *Rituals*.

Aripo Savannahs and around

Northeast of the Caroni Plains and right at the end of the Churchill Roosevelt Highway, stone pillars at the edge of the tarmac mark the entrance to the former American airbase at **Waller Field**. The hangars, barrack blocks and control rooms are long gone, however, replaced by a technology park and campus for the University of Trinidad & Tobago. The main reason to visit this area is to explore the 18 square kilometres of the **Aripo Savannah Scientific Reserve**, Trinidad's last remaining portion of savannah land, which was given protected status in 1934. In 1871, author Charles Kingsley wrote that the area "filled me with more admiration than anything I have seen in the island", and it's still a startlingly beautiful place, vast, eerie and empty despite its proximity to the Northern Range and the clamour of the East–West Corridor. The emptiness is deceiving, however; the area's sensitive ecosystem provides a home to 260 species of **birds** and 243 documented species of **flora**, many of which are rarely (if ever) seen elsewhere on the island. Among the plants are parasitic vines, wild calabash, ground orchids and the endemic carnivorous sundew plant, while savannah hawks, red-bellied macaws and fork-tailed palm swifts (among countless others) are more easily spotted here than elsewhere on Trinidad. Each savannah is divided by impressive galba-palm forests and palm marshes including abundant moriche palm trees, while the disused bunkers and wells are a legacy of World War II, when the Americans leased 1600 acres here to use for training exercises.

Visits are best at dawn when you get a spectacular aspect of the palms glowing in the light, along with the birds' dawn chorus. **Permits** are required from the Parks Section of the Forestry Division based in St Joseph (Ⓣ645 1203), and a guide is essential, both to prevent you getting lost and to point out the flora and fauna. The tour operators listed on p.41 offer trips to the area, as does locally based Thomas Gill (Ⓣ643 4911). The entrance to the reserve is at **Cumuto**, about 5km south of Waller Field on the eastern side of the road.

The Caroni Arena Dam and Reservoir

Signposted from the Churchill-Roosevelt Highway, Talparo Road runs south through serene rainforest where you'll rarely meet another car. As you pass the tiny settlements of Brazil and Talparo, the foothills of the Central Range appear, cloaked in luxuriant vegetation: thickets of bamboo jostle with papaya, mango, banana, cashew and breadfruit trees. The blooms of the golden poui dominate in April, while from December to March magnificent immortelle trees blaze a fiery red. A kilometre or so due east of Talparo Road on the signposted Caroni Arena Road, is the **Caroni Arena Dam and Reservoir** (daily 8am–6pm). Reaching 40.85m at its highest elevation, the dam is T&T's largest, while the reservoir covers 6.8 square kilometres. Caroni is a haven for **birds** and **animals**. Parrots, hawks and white egrets are frequent visitors, while blue emperor butterflies flutter among the reeds by the water's edge, caimans lurk in the swamps bordering the reservoir and red howler and capuchin monkeys, toucans and tree porcupines inhabit the surrounding forest. There's no public transport to the dam, though Paria Springs (☎ 622 8826) offer a birding tour here, and will arrange the necessary permits for entering the area.

Mount Tamana bat caves

Just east of the Caroni Arena Dam, distinctive, flat-topped **Mount Tamana** is the highest in the Central Range at 308m, and its porous limestone core holds a series of lengthy **cave systems** which provide the perfect home for huge colonies of **bats**. The gentle thirty-minute walk up Tamana's slopes is pleasant enough, threading through shady groves of lichen-covered cocoa trees and under giant silk cotton trees, with the occasional eye-popping view over the Caroni Plains. However, the real draw here is the bats, which make a spectacular exit en masse at **dusk** to feed. It's best to arrive around 4pm, in order to have enough time to walk up and enter the first of the caves, peek at the ceiling – almost every inch is covered with roosting bats – and exit before the sun goes down (though be warned that the bat droppings are copious). As dusk approaches, the first stragglers make their way out, and as the darkness thickens, the trickle becomes a stream as about a million and a half bats shoot past like furry, flapping balls, their sonars clicking away as they avoid flying into you.

Bang in the centre of Trinidad, Tamana is most easily reachable from Sangre Grande (see opposite) via the Cunapo Road. From there, it's a winding journey along heavily potholed minor roads, but as most of the route isn't signposted, and there's no easy way to find the path to the caves unless you know it, it's nigh-on impossible to visit Tamana independently. Caribbean Discovery Tours, Paria Springs, Limeland and tour guide Ivan Charles (see p.145) all offer trips.

The east coast

South of **Sangre Grande**, the largest town on this side of the island and a transportation hub of considerable commercial vigour, Trinidad's **east coast** is dominated by the **Cocal**, 24km of unbroken sand lined by swaying coconut palms, that begins at **Manzanilla** and stretches south to Point Radix. Beyond here the beach continues at **Mayaro**, long a popular holiday resort with Trinidadians but almost entirely undiscovered by foreign visitors. The Manzanilla–Mayaro Road runs the length of the east coast, fringed inland by the pristine rainforest and mangrove-smothered wetlands of **Nariva swamp**, a primary breeding ground and habitat for all manner of rare animals and birds, including manatees and monkeys.

In terms of **public transport**, Manzanilla **taxis** leave from the Republic Bank in Sangre Grande; to move onwards to Mayaro wait by *Hotel Carries on the Bay* (see p.174) – though transport along this route is fairly infrequent.

Sangre Grande

A thriving market town, **SANGRE GRANDE** ("big blood", after a long-forgotten battle between Amerindians and the incoming Spanish) – pronounced "sandy grandy" but usually just called "grandy" – is slung along the Eastern Main Road, a bustling transportation hub for the whole east coast from Toco to Mayaro, and the only place in the region with a bank or ATM. Residents of surrounding villages crowd the pavements every Friday to deposit wage cheques, shop at the market stalls, take a fast-food fix and drink the night away at the many **rum shops**. Most visitors pass through en route to somewhere else, or stop off to change taxis and maxis which, alongside **PTSC buses** to Arima and Port of Spain, leave from the square behind *Royal Castle* in the middle of the main drag; ask around to find the correct queue. Manzanilla Beach taxis leave from just past the police station next to the Republic Bank on the eastern side of town.

Manzanilla and around

South of Sangre Grande, the Eastern Main Road cuts a picturesque and winding 8km route towards the Atlantic coast; underground waterflows regularly cause subsidence, so if you're driving, take things slowly. A quiet and attractive village of gingerbread houses, **MANZANILLA** village straggles along roadside and down to the sea from the T-junction at the end of the Eastern Main Road (turn left at the end of the EMR at the signpost for "Manzanilla Beach"). Windswept and exposed, the wide expanse of fine brownish sand is usually deserted during the week but becomes a popular swimming spot at the weekends (though the murky water isn't particularly enticing), when locals descend with car boots full of food and drink. Take care while swimming, as the undercurrents can be dangerous. At the northern end of the beach, there's a car park and changing facilities (TT$1), and lifeguards patrol the first 4km of sand.

Brigand Hill Lighthouse

Built in 1958, the stubby white **Brigand Hill Lighthouse** (daily 8am–5pm; free), about 5km south of Manzanilla, is one of only three in Trinidad. You can't enter the lighthouse itself, but it's worth visiting to climb the twenty-odd iron stairs that run up the outside for a magnificent **view** stretching from Toco in the north to Galeota Point in the south, taking in the Caroni Plains and the flatlands of Nariva swamp. Red howler monkeys inhabit the trees around the lighthouse, and the troop passes by each evening at around 5.30pm.

The lighthouse is signposted off Plum Mitan Road, itself the right-hand turn at the T-junction for Manzanilla beach. Follow the road through Plum Mitan village, and take the signposted turn-off to the left, from where the road climbs steeply uphill. A word with the security guard should gain you entry at the gate.

Practicalities

Manzanilla Beach makes a good base from which to explore the Nariva Swamp, but though the setting is glorious, the area can feel a bit forlorn; if you're after sun and sand, head down to Mayaro. **Eating** options are few and far between; the café-bar at the beach facility sells inexpensive local lunches, from roti to baked chicken and macaroni pie, while *D'Hammerhead Beach Bar*, on the main road as it meets the sea, has barbecue chicken and pork with fries and salad.

Accommodation

Coconut Cove 33–36 Calypso Rd, Manzanilla Beach, ⓣ691 5939 or 374 0434 ⓦwww.dcoconutcove.com. Located at the end of the dirt track past *Hotel Carries*, this is Manzanilla's only "proper" hotel, right on the beach and sheltered by the Manzanilla Point headland. The smart double rooms have a/c, TV, DVD, microwave, fridge and a balcony overlooking the swimming pool and sea, and there's a restaurant on site. ③

Hotel Carries on the Bay Eastern Main Rd and Calypso Rd ⓣ668 5711. On the main road just at the point where the beach begins, but with a rather unlived-in feel, this is nonetheless a decent option. The breezy, modern rooms all have tiled floors, a/c, cable TV and private bathroom and are pleasant enough, while the on-site dining room offers meals on request. ⑤

Limeland House Old Plum Rd, Manzanilla ⓣ668 1356 or 798 5750, ⓦlimeland-tours.com. Located a few hundred metres along a bumpy road inland from *Dougie's* bar, these two smart self-contained apartments offer a good alternative to the beachside options. Each has two bedrooms with double and twin beds and a/c, plus kitchen and bathroom. Friendly English-Trini host Kayman is a knowledgeable tour guide and mine of local information. ④

The Cocal

Source of most of the **coconuts** sold in Trinidad, the waving groves of coconut palms that line the Manzanilla–Mayaro Road, known collectively as the **Cocal**, make for an awe-inspiring drive: 24km of graceful, leaning coconut trees dancing in the wind, with unspoilt, wave-pounded beach to one side and the wetlands of Nariva swamp to the other. There are no hotels or restaurants anywhere along the road (the only buildings are private holidays homes), but roadside stalls sell the shellfish known as chip-chip, freshly caught crabs, black conch, fish and, in season, watermelon.

Three-quarters of the way along, the road crosses the **Nariva River**, worth a stop for a lovely view of the mangroves along the banks; the waters are a popular swimming spot come the weekends, when cars line the roadside and chutney music blares out over the smooth sands. Nearing Mayaro (see p.177), the road runs past a coconut processing plant, surrounded by huge mounds of discarded husks. Between 5.30 and 6pm every night the air around here is raucous with the calls of the **red-chested macaws** that come to roost in the trees (binocular-toting birdwatchers often mark the spot), while the surrounding swampland is a good place to see southern lapwings and the rare red-breasted tanager. The ponds in this area are full of **cascadura**, a small brown fresh water fish, properly known as an armoured catfish, with a tough skeletal covering. It's said that if you eat their chewy brown meat (invariably served curried), you'll return to end your days in Trinidad, but picking and sucking the flesh from beneath the armour is a messy business.

Coconuts

Grown on estates throughout eastern Trinidad and the southwest peninsula, **coconuts** are in constant demand on account of their sheer versatility. Depending on when they are harvested, they can be a source of drink, food, oil, soap or animal feed, while their fibrous husk makes an alternative to peat for potting plants. Green nuts are full of sweet **water**, a popular drink sold fresh from the fruit from many an old Bedford van around the country. As the nut matures, much of the liquid is replaced by an edible white **jelly**. A few weeks later, the jelly solidifies into firm white flesh, which can be grated, dried and roasted in cooking. Later still, a **bread-like substance** grows in the centre of the fruit; if caught at the right time, it makes a tasty snack. Soon afterwards it develops into a sprout, from which a new tree will grow. Depending on the type, a tree will take five to ten years to mature and live for many years after that, producing nuts all year round.

▲ Mangroves at Nariva Swamp

Nariva swamp

One of Trinidad's most significant wildlife areas, the **Nariva swamp** covers fifteen square kilometres behind the coconut estates along the coast south of Manzanilla. The area is made up of agricultural land (rice and watermelons are the main crops), as well as reed-fringed marshes and, between the Mayaro–Manzanilla Road and the swamp itself, mangrove thickets. Deep in the southwestern corner lies the 16 square kilometres of **Bush Bush Island** (actually a peninsula standing around 3m higher than the surrounding land), bordered by palmiste and moriche palms and covered in hardwood forest and silk cotton trees. A unique freshwater ecosystem, Nariva harbours large concentrations of rare **wildlife**, with some 58 species of mammals, 37 species of reptiles and 171 species of birds. It's also home to 92 species of mosquito, so remember to bring your insect repellent.

The 1996 **Ramsar Convention** – to which Trinidad and Tobago is a signatory – designated the swamp a "Wetland of International Importance", placing a legal obligation on the government to protect and maintain the area. Reconciling human needs with the demands of conservation hasn't been easy, however. Many locals still hunt for both sport and sale, while illegal rice farming has destroyed much of the swamp's northern end. The government eventually expelled the major rice farmers, but small-scale cultivation continues. In addition, **bush fires**, often deliberately set to clear land, have ravaged almost half the territory; as a result, access is often prohibited during the dry season.

Nariva is hard to explore in any real depth independently, but if you're just passing by, it's worth taking a stroll along the signposted Kernaham Trace, which swings in from the Manzanilla–Mayaro Road to **Kernaham Village**, a widely dispersed collection of picturesque board houses, mostly on stilts, that are home to a friendly, overwhelmingly Indian community of farmers and fishermen. It's a beautiful scene, with the flatlands opening up huge expanses of open sky. Kernaham has a bar which occasionally serves food, as well as a building for worship that accommodates the community's Hindus, Muslims and Christians; it's marked with a moon and stars design on the outside, and a peek through the wall reveals icons (in picture form) of all three religions, illustrating Trinidad's strong tradition of cultural and religious acceptance.

If you want to **visit Bush Bush**, a **guide** is essential; prices vary. Stephen Broadbridge of Caribbean Discovery Tours (☎624 7281) offers a marvellous walk

Nariva's fauna and flora

Nariva is the only place in Trinidad where you can see the impossibly endearing **manatee** or sea-cow, an elephantine mammal whose peculiar appearance once fuelled rumours of mermaids lurking in the brackish depths. Seldom seen, manatees grow up to 3m in length, weigh over 900kg, and feed on water hyacinth, moss and water lilies. They're currently in danger of extinction: in the 1970s hundreds inhabited Nariva's swampland, but their numbers are now down to double figures as a result of increased human activity in the area, notably fishermen's nets. Equally hard to spot are **freshwater turtles**, though the swamp is an excellent place to view **caimans**, **red howler monkeys** (whose rather alarming, otherworldly roars reverberate around the forest), white-fronted **capuchin monkeys** (which have been known to shower human intruders with a hail of twigs), **opossums**, **porcupines** and three-toed and silky **anteaters**. Snakes include **macajuel boa constrictors** and non-venomous, greenish-brown, black-spotted **anacondas**, which can grow up to 9m long and are the heaviest reptiles in the world. Reputedly washed here from South America on the current of the Orinoco River, they're rarely seen despite their fearsome size, and there have been no known attacks on humans in Trinidad.

The swamp has many impressive **trees**, including the island's largest sandbox, with its vicious-looking spiked trunk, and plenty of cannonball trees (locally known as jumbie calabash), whose heavy fruits grow directly from the trunk. The canopies and the flatlands also harbour a wide variety of birds, from **savannah hawks** to **dicksissels**, **orange-winged** and **yellow-capped Amazon parrots**, and blue-gold and red-bellied **macaws**.

through Bush Bush, with kayaking if water levels permit and a truly excellent Indian lunch cooked by residents of Kernaham Village. Kayman Sagar of Limeland Tours (Ⓣ668 1356) is based in Manzanilla and visits the swamp regularly; his full- or half-day tours include kayaking and a Bush Bush walk, and he's an expert on Nariva's flora and fauna. If you're a serious ornithologist, opt for the excellent birding tours offered by Paria Springs (Ⓣ622 8826).

Mayaro

Some 24km south of Manzanilla, the road heads inland at Point Radix, crossing over the Ortoire River and passing the local market, where stalls sell fresh fish, lobsters and strings of wriggling crabs. **MAYARO** itself has grown out of two old French villages, Pierreville and Plaisance, and is still marked as such on some maps. **Pierreville**, on the Mayaro–Guayaguayare Road, is the business end of town, a neat nexus of shops and small businesses. A side road cuts east to the village's seaside quarter, **Plaisance**, a lovely place with a thoroughly relaxing atmosphere whose greatest attraction is its **beach**, a gentle, coconut-tree-lined curve of clean, soft brown sand that's one of the most popular bathing spots on Mayaro Bay, along with **Queen's Beach** a couple of kilometres further south (signboards for the oceanside hotels here mark the turn-off from the Mayaro–Guayaguayare Road); both spots only see crowds at the weekends, however. Lifeguards patrol from 10am to 6pm, but there are no public changing rooms, toilets or other facilities on this or any other part of the bay. The Queen's Beach resorts all have restaurants and non-guests can usually use the swimming pool at the *Radix Beach Resort* for a small charge. Note that the sea in this area has **strong currents**, so exercise caution.

Past Queen's Beach, the road swings past pasturelands and, with increasing frequency, luxurious houses built by the oil companies for their managers and workers; BP even have an entire compound, a fenced-off affair reminiscent of a 1950s holiday camp.

Practicalities

As well as the places listed below, Mayaro holds a number of private houses rented out as holiday homes, which are advertised in the classified sections of the local papers and are great of you're travelling in a group and want to make a weekend of it. Trini holidaymakers tend to do their own cooking, often barbecuing on the beach, and most hotels have rooms with kitchens; stock up on supplies before you arrive, as the supermarkets along the Mayaro–Guayagayare Road and Mayaro Village aren't up to much. In terms of **restaurants**, there's a *KFC* in the village centre, as well as several places selling Creole food and roti in the centre and down by Plaisance Beach. For more formal dining, the **restaurant** at *Azee's Guest House* (see below) serves delicious, inexpensive Creole food and pizza, while the larger air-conditioned restaurant at *Queen's Beach* does lovely breakfasts, lunches and dinners: fish broth, salads, chicken and fish. There are also a few lively **rum shops** on the road leading down to Plaisance Beach if you feel like a drink and a lime.

Accommodation

Azee's Guest House 3½ mile marker Mayaro–Guayaguayare Rd Ⓣ630 4619. A small, friendly hotel just two minutes' walk from the beach. All rooms have a/c, cable TV, fridge and en-suite bathroom, and there's a homely bar and an open-air restaurant. ③

Harry's Guest House – The Seagull 3¾ mile marker Mayaro–Guayaguayare Rd Ⓣ630 3188 or 769 6310, Ⓦwww.harrys4u.net. Family-orientated place on the beach with various facilities including volleyball and basketball courts, childrens' splash pool and a play area. Studios, 2-, 3- and 4-bedroom apartments all come with a/c, cable TV, kitchen and bathroom, and there are barbecue pits and shady gazebos with hammocks for chilling out. ③–⑤

Queen's Beach Hotel & Holiday Resort Church Rd, Radix Village Ⓣ630 5532, Ⓕ630 5607. One of the largest beachside properties, and one of the few that feels like a proper resort hotel, this is a friendly place with a personal touch, decked out in a smart shade of green. The large rooms have a/c, TV, fridge and en-suite bathrooms, plus there's a restaurant and a lively bar with a pool table on site. A new wing and a pool were under construction at the time of writing. ③

Radix Beach Resort Church Rd, Radix Village Ⓣ630 6676. Some of the rooms are a little dark, but all come with a/c, private bathrooms and cable TV, and there's a nice swimming pool on site, as well as a gym and volleyball court. ③

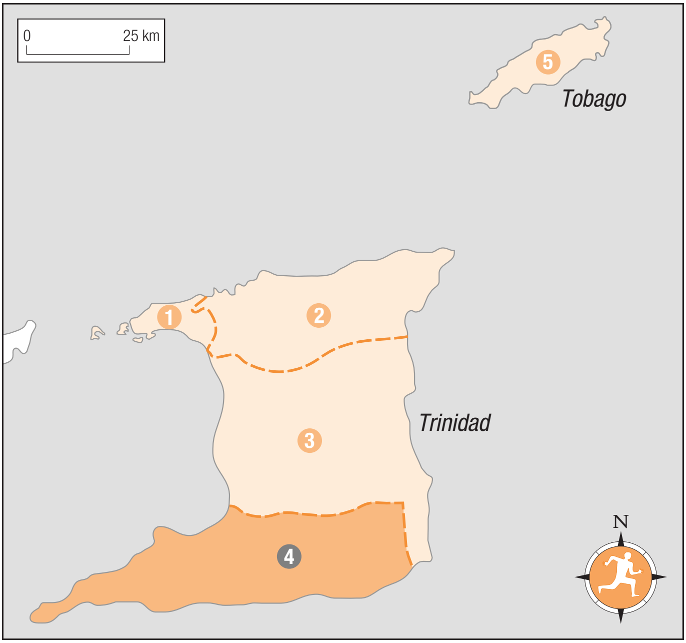
Splash by R.A.S.H. Church Rd, Radix Village Ⓣ630 7274 or 386 5803. A collection of brightly painted 1- to 4-bedroom self-contained apartments with a/c, full kitchens, cable TV, balcony and ocean views; linen is provided, but towels are not. There's a covered, hammock-slung gazebo for barbecues and chilling out, recliners for relaxing on the beach, and a pool, jacuzzi and sauna on site. ③

Galeota Point and Guayaguayare

The southeastern tip of Trinidad, **Galeota Point** is strictly the domain of American oil companies, with oil storage tanks dotted along the roadside and several rigs offshore. The point itself is the private reserve of Amoco. Two kilometres past Galeota Point, the road swings onto the south coast at **GUAYAGUAYARE**, a quiet fishing village with a flotilla of pirogues bobbing in the bay, which holds the distinction of having been the place where oil was first discovered on the island in 1819; the village blossomed in the early twentieth century when the petroleum industry really got going. Unless you are here in connection with the oil business, however, it's a quiet and uneventful place, with the action centred around the *Sea Wall Beach and Boat Club* (Ⓣ630 6369), where you can get a beastly cold beer or a plate of fresh fish.

4

San Fernando and the south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CHAPTER 4

Highlights

- **San Fernando** As well as stunning views from its central hill, the island's second city offers a host of handsome gingerbread buildings and some great restaurants, bars and clubs in which to dine and lime. See pp.181–189
- **Kayaking the South Oropuche River** An easily accessible kayak tour through rarely visited but pristine mangrove, with a variety of birdlife. See p.190
- **The Pitch Lake and La Brea village** This fascinating geological wonder is the largest of its kind in the world. The historical village illustrates Trinidad's striking quandary: how to balance industrial development while dealing with poverty. See p.190
- **Icacos and the far southwest** One of the island's most stunning landscapes: quiet, undulating roads lined with teak plantations, coconut estates and a mangrove swamp, typically ending at an idyllic beach. See p.192
- **Indian food at Debe** Arrive in the village at dusk for the best street food on the island, from great doubles to pakoras and super-sweet traditional candies. See p.194
- **Moruga** Isolated, but still accessible and with a stunning beach, this quiet and deeply religious fishing village has a unique atmosphere all its own. See p.197

▲ Pitch Lake, La Brea

4

San Fernando and the south

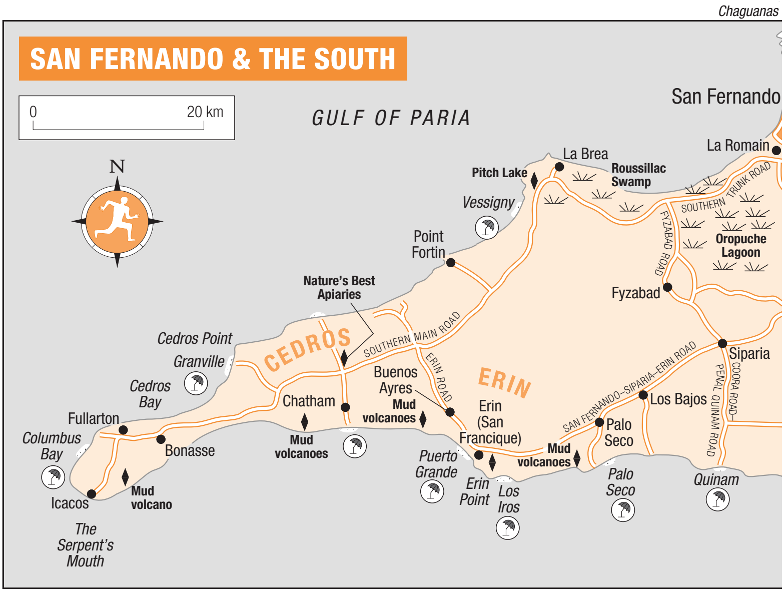
Geographically, Trinidad's **south** presents a mirror image of the north: a long littoral extending beyond the main body of the island, with the low ridge of the forested Southern Range as its spine. In the Gulf of Paria, where the southwest peninsula crooks a finger towards Venezuela, Trinidad's second city, precipitous **San Fernando**, sits at the base of its oddly shaped landmark hill, while to the south, the vast reserves of asphalt at the **Pitch Lake** represents the only potted attraction in these parts.

That's as far as the comparison goes, however. San Fernando is a booming business town, but beyond its city limits lies Trinidad's most sparsely populated region. Although many southerners still earn a living from agriculture and fishing, the economy here is hinged around **oil**, pumped both from offshore rigs and the 1600-odd pumping jacks scattered all over the countryside, many in large expanses of forest which, aside from the pumps, remain largely undeveloped. The coast, meanwhile, is similarly untouched, with picturesque **Cedros** and **Erin**, or the remote fishing village of **Moruga** seeing few visitors, despite offering gorgeous scenery and lovely yellow-sand **beaches**, best visited during the dry season (December to May) when the sea and sand are clear. (During the rainy months, rivers wash muddy brackish water and a fair bit of rubbish into the sea.)

Though the South isn't traditional tourist territory, you'll find that hospitality is really second to none here, with locals keen to show visitors what Trini life is like away from the capital. The lack of tourism is a mixed blessing, though: there are no crowds but also few facilities for visitors. Outside of San Fernando, **accommodation** is practically nonexistent, but given the somnolent nature of the south, and the relatively compact area, you're best off staying in San Fernando, exploring by way of day-trips and returning in the evenings to take advantage of the city's bars and restaurants. San Fernando is also the transport hub for south and central Trinidad, with maxis and taxis going direct to the major towns, as well as some more far-flung destinations such as Erin and Cedros.

San Fernando

Nestled against the base of its eponymous flat-top hill, **SAN FERNANDO** boasts a striking setting, and despite its status as T&T's industrial capital, the city has a surprisingly old-fashioned and laidback charm. Reminiscent of a miniature,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FYZABAD ROAD
Oropuche Lagoon
Point Fortin
Fyzabad
Nature's Best Apiaries
Cedros Point
Granville
CEDROS
SOUTHERN MAIN ROAD
ERIN ROAD
Siparia
Cedros Bay
Buenos Ayres
ERIN
SAN FERNANDO–SIPARIA–ERIN ROAD
Los Bajos
PENAL QUINAM ROAD
COORA ROAD
Chatham
Mud volcanoes
Erin (San Francique)
Palo Seco
Fullarton
Columbus Bay
Bonasse
Mud volcanoes
Puerto Grande
Mud volcanoes
Palo Seco
Quinam
Erin Point
Los Iros
Icacos
Mud volcano
The Serpent's Mouth

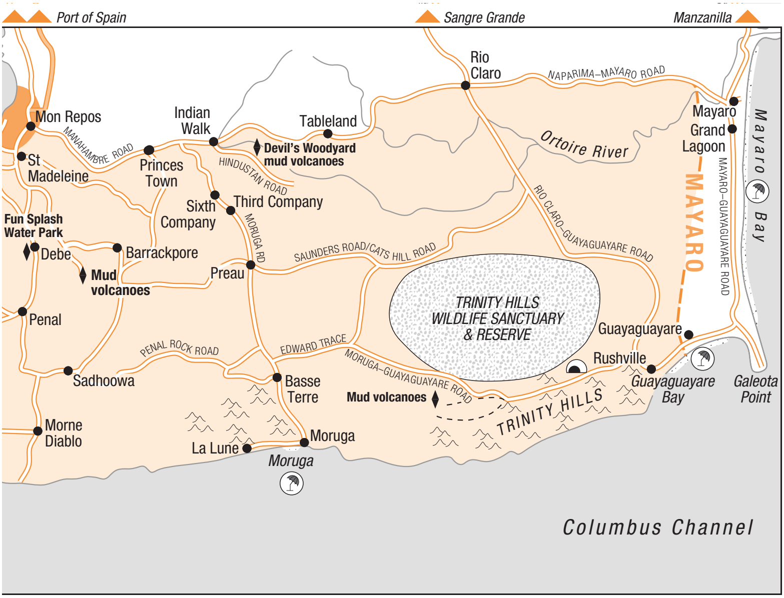
low-key San Francisco, its warren of steep, winding lanes offers pretty sea views, while many weather-beaten gingerbread buildings have survived the rapid industrial development of recent years.

San Fernando – known as just "**Sando**" to locals – has always maintained an independent spirit. An oil city first and foremost, it sees many business visitors but few sightseers, and tourists are basically left to figure it out independently – though the friendly and hospitable residents make it a pleasurable place to get a flavour of Trini life. And in recent years, the burgeoning wealth from the natural gas and oil industries have helped to push up demand for quality entertainment, from the annual **Jazz Festival** on San Fernando Hill to a slew of high-class **bars**, **restaurants** and **clubs** alongside the many more grass-roots options for dining, drinking and partying.

Bordered by the Gulf of Paria on one side and the rocky, wooded outcrop of **San Fernando Hill** on the other, the city's compact centre is easily negotiated on foot, with most of the historical sights, shops and transport stands located on and around **Harris Promenade**, a broad, elegant boulevard running west from the main junction and focal point, **Library Corner**.

Some history

Having served as a sacred spot for Amerindian tribes, San Fernando's first European arrival was **Sir Walter Raleigh**, who put in here during a voyage in 1595 – he was unimpressed and sailed on. **Capuchin priests** established a mission here in 1687, but the settlement only began to flourish after 1784, when French plantation owners attracted by the *cedula* (see p.266) were allocated land here and established the first estates; in the same year, Spanish governor José Maria Chacon named the settlement San Fernando de Naparima in honour of King Carlos III's new son. By 1797, when the British captured the island, San Fernando had more than a thousand inhabitants, twenty sugar mills and eight rum distilleries. Surrounded by fertile agricultural land, the town continued to grow, and by 1811 the population had trebled; by the middle of the century, it was the hub of the entire south, a busy

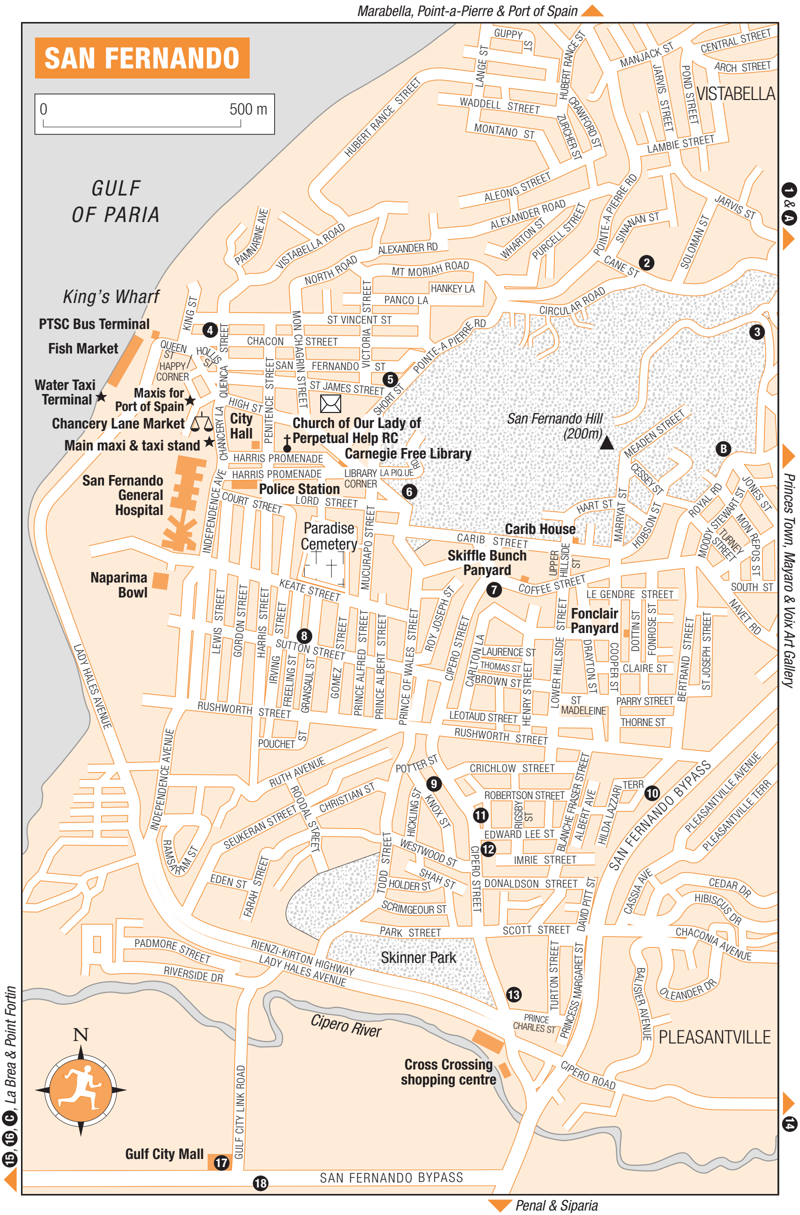

Port of Spain
Sangre Grande
Manzanilla
Rio Claro
NAPARIMA–MAYARO ROAD
Mon Repos
Indian Walk
Tableland
Mayaro
Grand Lagoon
Mayaro Bay
MANAHAMBRE ROAD
St Madeleine
Princes Town
Devil's Woodyard mud volcanoes
Ortoire River
HINDUSTAN ROAD
MAYARO
MAYARO–GUAYAGUAYARE ROAD
Sixth Company
Third Company
Fun Splash Water Park
MORUGA RD
RIO CLARO–GUAYAGUAYARE ROAD
Debe
Barrackpore
SAUNDERS ROAD/CATS HILL ROAD
Mud volcanoes
Preau
TRINITY HILLS WILDLIFE SANCTUARY & RESERVE
Penal
Guayaguayare
PENAL ROCK ROAD
EDWARD TRACE
Rushville
Sadhoowa
MORUGA–GUAYAGUAYARE ROAD
Basse Terre
Guayaguayare Bay
Galeota Point
Mud volcanoes
TRINITY HILLS
Morne Diablo
Moruga
La Lune
Moruga
Columbus Channel

trading centre for the region's planters, with a regular coastal steamer to Port of Spain – the overland route took three days of rough riding through forests and swamps. The arrival of the **railway** in 1882 led to another population increase, and by the late 1880s San Fernando had been thoroughly modernized. Suburbs grew as the plantations disappeared – the result of falling sugar prices in the 1920s – and the town became dominated by the expanding **oil industry**. Designated a city in 1988, San Fernando continued to expand through the early 1990s, bringing the northern city limits up to the oil refinery at Point-a-Pierre and increasing its population by around 10,000 (it's a little over 60,000 today), with many inhabitants moving out to the chocolate-box housing developments on the eastern outskirts of town.

Arrival, information and getting around

From Port of Spain, **PTSC buses** (express bus: Mon–Sat every 30min 5am–9.00pm) arrive at the terminal at the bottom of Queen Street, by the fish market; green-stripe **maxis** arrive behind the Chancery Lane Market; and **route taxis** at Library Corner, at the top of High Street. A large lot between the Chancery Lane Market and the San Fernando General Hospital serves as the **main transport stand** for destinations in the south of the country (see the box on p.185).

Given the city's sprawling layout and its numerous hills, you'll need a car or public transport to **get around** if heading away from the centre. Route taxis ply the streets around the clock; almost all routes originate at – or at least pass through – **Library Corner**, but be sure to ask the driver where he's going before getting in. From next to the *KFC* in Library Corner, "**round the road**" taxis follow a loop around the city centre, circling San Fernando Hill; this is also the departure point for taxis to the **Cross Crossing** and **Gulf City** shopping malls. Two local **private taxi** firms are Mattadeen's Taxicab Service (Ⓣ658 4973) and St Anthony's Taxicab Co-Operative (Ⓣ648 3941). If you want to **rent a car**, contact Convenient, Southern Main Road, Claxton Bay (Ⓣ659 3015).


SAN FERNANDO
0 500 m
Marabella, Point-a-Pierre & Port of Spain
Penal & Siparia
Princes Town, Mayaro & Voix Art Gallery
1 & A
14
15, 16, C, La Brea & Point Fortin
N
GULF OF PARIA
VISTABELLA
PLEASANTVILLE
King's Wharf
PTSC Bus Terminal
Fish Market
Water Taxi Terminal
Maxis for Port of Spain
Chancery Lane Market
Main maxi & taxi stand
San Fernando General Hospital
Naparima Bowl
City Hall
Church of Our Lady of Perpetual Help RC
Carnegie Free Library
Police Station
Paradise Cemetery
San Fernando Hill (200m)
Carib House
Skiffle Bunch Panyard
Fonclair Panyard
Skinner Park
Cipero River
Cross Crossing shopping centre
Gulf City Mall
HAPPY CORNER
LIBRARY CORNER
LA PIQ.UE
GUPPY ST
LANGE ST
HUBERT RANCE ST
HUBERT RANCE STREET
MANJACK ST
CENTRAL STREET
ARCH STREET
JARVIS STREET
POND STREET
WADDELL STREET
CRAWFORD ST
ZURCHER ST
MONTANO ST
LAMBIE STREET
ALEONG STREET
ALEXANDER ROAD
WHARTON ST
PURCELL STREET
POINTE-A-PIERRE RD
SINANAN ST
JARVIS ST
SOLOMAN ST
CANE ST
PAMNARINE AVE
VISTABELLA ROAD
ALEXANDER RD
NORTH ROAD
MT MORIAH ROAD
HANKEY LA
PANCO LA
CIRCULAR ROAD
KING ST
QUEEN ST
HOLLIS ST
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ST VINCENT ST
MON CHAGRIN STREET
VICTORIA STREET
SAN FERNANDO ST
ST JAMES STREET
SHORT ST
QUENCA STREET
HIGH ST
PENITENCE STREET
CHANCERY LA
HARRIS PROMENADE
INDEPENDENCE AVE
COURT STREET
LORD STREET
MUCURAPO STREET
CARIB STREET
MEADEN STREET
CESSEY ST
HART ST
MARRYAT ST
HOBSON ST
ROYAL RD
JONES ST
STEWART ST
MOODY STREET
TURNEY STREET
MON REPOS ST
SOUTH ST
NAVET RD
UPPER HILLSIDE ST
COFFEE STREET
LE GENDRE STREET
ROY JOSEPH ST
CIPERO STREET
KEATE STREET
LEWIS STREET
GORDON STREET
HARRIS STREET
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IRVING
FREELING ST
GRANSAUL ST
GOMEZ
STREET
PRINCE ALFRED STREET
PRINCE ALBERT STREET
PRINCE OF WALES STREET
CARLTON LA
LAURENCE ST
THOMAS ST
BROWN ST
HENRY STREET
LOWER HILLSIDE STREET
DRAYTON ST
COOPER ST
DOTTIN ST
FONROSE ST
BERTRAND STREET
ST JOSEPH STREET
CLAIRE ST
PARRY STREET
ST MADELEINE
THORNE ST
LEOTAUD STREET
RUSHWORTH STREET
LADY HALES AVENUE
POUCHET ST
RUTH AVENUE
POTTER ST
CRICHLOW STREET
ROBERTSON STREET
RIGSBY ST
BLANCHE FRASER STREET
ALBERT AVE
HILDA LAZZARI TERR
SAN FERNANDO BYPASS
PLEASANTVILLE AVENUE
PLEASANTVILLE TERR
INDEPENDENCE AVENUE
RODDAL STREET
CHRISTIAN ST
SEUKERAN STREET
RAMSARAM ST
HICKLING ST
KNOX ST
EDWARD LEE ST
WESTWOOD ST
IMRIE STREET
CIPERO STREET
TODD STREET
SHAH ST
HOLDER ST
DONALDSON STREET
ST
EDEN ST
FARAH STREET
SCRIMGEOUR ST
DAVID PITT ST
CASSIA AVE
CEDAR DR
HIBISCUS DR
CHACONIA AVENUE
PARK STREET
SCOTT STREET
PADMORE STREET
RIENZI-KIRTON HIGHWAY
LADY HALES AVENUE
RIVERSIDE DR
TURTON STREET
PRINCESS MARGARET ST
BALISIER AVENUE
OLEANDER DR
PRINCE CHARLES ST
CIPERO ROAD
GULF CITY LINK ROAD
SAN FERNANDO BYPASS
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17
18
A
B

ACCOMMODATION

Paria Suites	C
Royal	B
Trade Winds	A

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Amin's	11
Atherly's by the Park	13
Blue Martini	8
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Moving on from San Fernando

The **main transport stand** for rides to the rest of the south is adjacent to the San Fernando General Hospital on Chancery Lane. **Maxis** go from here to La Brea, Vessigny, Penal, Siparia, Fyzabad and Point Fortin. For Palo Seco, take a maxi to Siparia and then change. **Route taxis** from this stand run to La Brea, Vessigny, Erin, Siparia, Palo Seco and Point Fortin.

Other destinations have stands located around the city centre. Maxis for **Point-a-Pierre**, **Couva** and **Chaguanas** depart from St James Street between Penitence and Mon Chagrin streets, while those for **Princes Town** go from Coffee Street. Route taxis to **Penal** leave from High Street and those to **Fyzabad** and **Princes Town** from the corner of Mucurapo and Lord streets. To go to **Granville** and **Icacos**, you have to change at Point Fortin. To reach **Mayaro**, go via Princes Town and Rio Claro.

For information about **PTSC bus** services, ring ⓣ652 3705 (ticket office: Mon–Fri 5am–8pm, Sat 6am–7pm, Sun 6am–1pm). All buses to Port of Spain run from the main bus terminal at the bottom of Queen Street (see above).

Accommodation

Given the lack of tourist infrastructure and the expense accounts of business travellers, the city is woefully short on **accommodation** at the cheaper end of the spectrum. Be aware that the disarmingly named *Hotel Tokyo*, right in the city centre on St James Street, and *Villa Capri* in Marabella just north of San Fernando, are both brothels.

Paria Suites Southern Trunk Rd, La Romaine ⓣ697 1442, ⓦwww.pariasuites.com. Overlooking the Gulf of Paria a few kilometres southwest of San Fernando, but easily reached on any maxi or taxi going to La Brea, Point Fortin, Fyzabad or Siparia. Rooms come with a/c, private bathrooms and cable TV, while an on-site swimming pool, restaurant and busy bar and nightclub (see p.189) provide welcome entertainment. Wi-fi available. ⑤

Royal Hotel 46–54 Royal Rd ⓣ652 4881, ⓦwww.royalhoteltt.com. As central a location as you're going to get in San Fernando, a fifteen-minute walk from Library Corner. Comfortable, bright rooms with a/c, cable TV, phone, fridge and en-suite bathrooms. There's a breezy open-air restaurant on site, as well as a pleasant, reasonably large swimming pool. Rates include continental breakfast and wi-fi access. ⑥

Tradewinds Hotel 38 London St, St Joseph Village ⓣ652 9463, ⓦwww.tradewindshotel.net. The best-equipped hotel in the south, occupying a pleasant – albeit not a very central – location on a breezy hill in quiet St Joseph Village. The best rooms are in the renovated and ultra-modern building next to the swimming pool, bar and restaurant, all with a/c, cable TV, fridge, microwave oven, minibar, kettle and nice bathrooms. There's a large gym, jacuzzi and free wi-fi; good buffet breakfast is included in the rates, as is a shuttle to Piarco airport. ⑤

The City

At 200m high, **San Fernando Hill** overshadows the town centre, and has long been a sacred place for **Amerindian** tribes from the South American mainland, who made annual pilgrimages to the site from 6500 BC up to the early 1900s. According to legend, the hill is the final resting place of Haburi the Hero and his mother, who were fleeing from the Frog Woman in the Orinoco Delta in Venezuela; on reaching Trinidad, however, they were turned into "Anaparima", the original Amerindian name for the hill. Half flattened, with steep protruding points, it owes its modern-day profile to years of gravel mining, but was declared a national park in 1980. The summit has been landscaped, with shaded picnic tables, a children's playground, café, public toilets and several lookouts from which to enjoy the **views**; there's a telescope mounted on the open balcony of the new visitor centre. The panorama includes the city, the Gulf of Paria and the flaming chimneys at Point-a-Pierre and Point Lisas, and the ever-growing suburbs and agricultural plains of the interior. Adjacent to the ice-cream colours of the new housing developments east of San Fernando, you should also be able to pick out the floodlights of the controversial Brian Lara stadium adjacent to the highway at Tarouba. Supposed to have been completed in 2007 for the Cricket World Cup, the complex was unfinished at the time of writing, though its construction had eaten up more than TT$7 million of public funds; it's said to contain a state-of-the-art tsunami shelter in its bowels, built at the behest of former PNM Prime Minister Patrick Manning. The clearly signposted road to the summit (daily 9am–6pm) is next to *Soong's Great Wall* restaurant (see p.188).

Just past *Soong's*, several streets wind up the hill into the exclusive residential suburb of **St Joseph Village**, the location of some of San Fernando's most sumptuous houses. In the other direction, the Naparima Mayaro Road continues past the major intersection with the San Fernando Bypass, crosses over the Solomon Hochoy Highway, and continues towards Princes Town. A kilometre along this road on the right-hand side is the **Voix Art Gallery**, 14 Naparima–Mayaro Rd, Upper Cocoyea (☎652 0710 or 768 9664; Mon–Sat 10am–6pm) which, despite having a relatively small space, has managed to acquire a diverse collection of paintings, from portraits combined with collages of dance and motion by Keith Ward to abstract spiritual paintings by Leroy Clarke and photo-realism and landscapes (including a beautiful manatee painting) by Trevor Byron.

Harris Promenade and around

The centre of San Fernando's civic life and the location of several attractive colonial-era buildings, **Harris Promenade** stretches from the long 1950s-style facade of **San Fernando General Hospital** to Library Corner in the east, its shady paved centre dotted with benches and tables, an ornate Victorian bandstand and **statues** of Mahatma Gandhi and Jamaican black rights activist Marcus Garvey. On the southwestern end, the distinctive yellow-stone building with its curving arched windows is the city's **police station**, though a fire in 2009 has left half of it roofless. Across the road, the grand Neoclassical **City Hall** from 1930 dominates the western end of the promenade, though it faces stiff competition from the Catholic **Church of Our Lady of Perpetual Help** one block to the east, a huge white modern building with a tall clocktower that can be seen from most places in the city. Though impressive from the outside, its interior is unusually stark for a Catholic place of worship.

The promenade's two roads converge in front of the **Carnegie Free Library** (Mon–Fri 8.30am–6pm, Sat 8.30am–noon; ☎652 3228), an ornate terracotta pile built in 1919 and financed – like many others the world over – by the Scottish philanthropist Andrew Carnegie. Behind it, on the promenade, an old **steam locomotive** recalls the last run from Port of Spain to San Fernando in 1968. People packed the carriages, hanging out of the windows to be part of this historic occasion, which was subsequently immortalized by the late Lord Kitchener's famous calypso *Last Train to San Fernando*. The chaotic junction of seven roads just east of the library is known as **Library Corner**, with its modern clocktower.

Walking west from Library Corner, **High Street** is San Fernando's main shopping drag, with street vendors hawk everything from plastic trinkets to leopardskin underwear on the pavement in front of the stores. At its western end, as High Street doglegs into Queen Street, the sea comes into view. This area, ironically known as **Happy Corner**, is the most run-down in the city, but a few colonial buildings, including *Hotel Happy Corner* (a flophouse) with its pretty balcony overlooking the junction of Queen and King streets, provide some architectural interest, while the patrons of the local rum shops add a touch of raffish zest. Happy Corner gives onto

King's Wharf, a scruffy tarmac dock fronting a small harbour where fishing boats bob up and down on the swell; the adjacent **fish market** stands next to the new **water-taxi terminal**.

Beyond here, **Lady Hales Avenue** skirts the coast and veers east through the southern part of the city (where it runs parallel with the Rienzi-Kirton Highway), close to San Fernando's two major shopping malls Gulf City and Cross Crossing and **Skinner Park**, the venue for regular concerts and fetes.

The Coffee

Turning south off Carib Street from the middle point of San Fernando Hill, **Coffee Street** takes its name from the coffee plantations that once thrived here. "The Coffee", as it's familiarly known, was the original home of many of the south's **steel bands**, including the highly acclaimed **Fonclaire**, now located on Dottin Street, one block south of Coffee Street. A brightly painted statue of a pan player at the junction of Coffee and Cipero streets celebrates the area's musical heritage. A little further down Coffee Street opposite the Southern Food Basket supermarket is the panyard of the **Skiffle Bunch**, a regular participant in the Panorama Finals at Carnival time. Just past the panyard, on the corner of Cipero Street, a statue of a lone pannist attests to the importance of T&T's national instrument to the area. The Coffee is particularly lively during the run-up to Carnival, when Skiffle Bunch practice sessions ring out into the street.

Eating and drinking

Grabbing a quick fix of roti, chow mein or fried chicken is hardly a problem in San Fernando, where numerous **fast-food outlets** line the streets. There's an especially high concentration of informal places for weekday lunches or early dinners along High Street, Cipero Street and The Coffee, while the large food court at the Gulf City Mall (see above) is heaving on Saturdays and offers a variety of food for most tastes. If you're after some evening **street food**, check the stalls that set up on Lady Hales Avenue opposite Skinner Park, serving corn soup, doubles and the like.

The city's numerous friendly **rum shops** (*Machismo* at the top of Lord Street is a safe bet) remain the evening of choice for the majority of locals – the ideal place to sink a few beers and partake in some drunken conversation. There are also several lively bars, and a few of the restaurants are also good for a drink.

Restaurants

Amin's 10 Cipero St ☎652 5108. Reckoned by many to be the best roti shop in town, with all the usual fillings and long queues forming at lunchtime. Food tends to run out by 2 or 3pm, so go early.

Atherly's by the Park 104 Gooding Village ☎652 0873. Roadside restaurant and bar close to Skinner Park with an a/c main room and a couple of tables outside, serving inexpensive, reliable Creole and Indian dishes, principally at lunchtime, when there's a buffet on Wednesdays. Good for a drink in the evenings, when a DJ plays a nice selection of calypso, reggae and old hits Tues–Sun, and there's a happy hour on Friday evenings. Daily 10am–2am.

Blue Martini 34 Sutton St ☎653 0549. Set in a pretty old wooden building, with seating downstairs and on an upper floor, this is a great spot for a meal or a drink. The menu runs from salads and burgers (including jerk pork and flying fish) to steaks and Chinese food, and there are regular drinks promotions, and karaoke on Tuesday nights. Sports events are shown on a big screen. Mon–Thurs 10am–2am, Fri 10am–3am, Sat 10am–4am.

Jenny's Wok & Steakhouse 175 Cipero Rd, Victoria Village ☎652 1807. Located some distance from the town centre in a warehouse-dominated industrial area, but a popular after-work liming spot all the same with its large, three-sided American-style bar and decent, though somewhat pricey, Chinese food, steaks and seafood. Delivery available. Mon–Thurs 11am–10pm, Fri & Sat 11am–11pm.

L'Attitude 18–24 Quenca St ☎657 8033. The most exclusive restaurant in Sando, with prices to match. Nonetheless the quality is very much there and the innovative international menu is particularly wide ranging: stand-starters include mussels in tequila or scallops with mushrooms and cream; mains range from duck or lamb in almond butter to surf n' turf, pepper T-bone steaks, and signature Chicken L'Attitude with shrimp, white wine and lime. There's a good cocktail menu, and the upstairs terrace adds to the cosy ambience. Lunch Mon–Fri until 2.30pm, dinner Tues–Sat 6–10pm.

Mother Nature 58 St James St. This shop and café is known for its good range of inexpensive natural juices and vegetarian snacks, alongside "miracle" vitamin supplements. Provides a good break from the downtown Sando mayhem.

Nam Fong Lotus 91–93 Cipero St ⓣ652 3356. Serves huge Chinese lunches and dinners – the signature dish is Char Sue Kai Fan (chicken, pork and rice) – at inexpensive prices. A relaxing, comfy and more refined atmosphere than the usual plastic tables, and better value than the other upmarket Chinese restaurants in town. Mon–Sat 10am–10pm.

Puff 'n Stuff 40 Circular Rd ⓣ657 5920. Bakery owned by the same people as the *Tradewinds Hotel*, selling excellent fresh cakes, pastries, sandwiches, moist brownies, fluffy tuna puffs and rum fruitcake. Takeaway only. Mon–Sat 6am–9pm, Sun 6am–8pm.

Rising Star M. Rampersad Building, Hilda Lazzari Terrace ⓣ685 9539. Busy place, serving a huge menu of reasonably priced Chinese food including good veggie options, as well as steaks, while the bar area makes a good liming spot.

Royal Hotel Restaurant 46–54 Royal Rd ⓣ652 4881. Comfortable hotel restaurant serving international breakfasts with Creole touches such as saltfish buljol, sandwiches at lunch, and steak or fish dinners, served either under an open-air pavilion or in an a/c dining room. Daily 6am–10.30pm.

Soong's Great Wall 97 Circular Rd ⓣ657 5050. High-quality and slightly higher-priced expensive Chinese food – as well as international cuisine such as steak dinners – served in an ornate pagoda-shaped building; some outdoor seating. Popular buffet at Sun lunchtime. Mon–Thurs & Sun 11am–10pm, Fri & Sat 11am–10.30pm.

Tradewinds Bar and Grill 38 London St ⓣ652 9463. Not nearly as lively or popular as the now defunct *Treehouse* – but still a friendly place with a reasonable menu featuring grilled seafood and steaks and the odd Mexican and Cajun dish. Open 7 days till 10pm, later on Fri & Sat.

Bars

Gallery Pub Top Level, Gulf City Mall ⓣ688 9329. Straightforward pub offering sports and music videos on TVs and the usual selection of beers and spirits, plus a few cocktails. Especially busy on Fridays and Saturdays, both at night and in the afternoons as shoppers in the mall stop off for a quick lime. Attracts a more mature crowd than the clubs here. Mon–Sat 11am–midnight, Sun 2–10pm.

Jazz & Calypso Lounge 110 Cipero St ⓣ653 9725. Chic place with its wood-panelled floors, photographs of music greats and an excellent selection of rums and single malts. Owned by the Sando Jazz Festival promoter, the bar features live jazz and calypso/poetry on Sundays from 6pm, and at other times plays good jazz and Latin music.

Nightlife and entertainment

San Fernando has a healthy quota of **nightclubs**, from the unpretentious to the painfully stylish. As to live music, Skinner Park (ⓣ657 7168; entrance tickets vary), on Rienzi-Kirton Highway at the southern edge of the city, hosts Carnival fetes and concerts, while the **Naparima Bowl**, 19 Paradise Pasture (ⓣ657 8770), is another worthy venue year-round. The **San Fernando Jazz Festival** in September is also well worth taking in, as are the other concerts staged on the Hill throughout the year.

San Fernando has three **cinemas**, each catering to distinctly different tastes: Hobosco II, 21–23 Mucurapo St (ⓣ652 4543), shows kung-fu films; Metro, 41–43 Harris Promenade (ⓣ652 4107), specializes in Bollywood; while National Cinema, Keate Street, at Gomez (ⓣ652 2343), screens double bills of Hollywood fare.

Nightclubs

HiRPM Top Level, Gulf City Mall ⓣ652 3760, ⓦwww.hirpm.net. Long-standing club that takes the credit for introducing rock music to San Fernando. Wednesday's rock nights remain very popular, while at weekends it's the typical hip-hop, dub, soca and dance/techno music. Cover charge usually around TT$25. Daily 10pm–4am.

Privé 23 South Trunk Rd, La Romain ⓣ652 4360, ⓦwww.privecl.com. Styled as the south's more upscale club, with handsome decor, and an outdoor area, lounge and main dancefloor. The well-dressed

▲ Roxborough Folk Performers at Naparima Bowl, San Fernando

crowd pack in for Latin night on Wednesdays, and the Friday and Saturday party nights. Arrive early to avoid long queues, and dress to impress. Cover TT$60–150. Wed, Fri & Sat 9pm–late.

Richie's Paradise Cipero St Ⓣ653 0711. A great underground club close to the centre of town, attracting a more mature crowd and lots of couples (late 20s–40s), and with a big dancefloor; music ranges from back-in-times (retro) reggae and soul to dance. Cover charge usually TT$30. Wed–Sun 6pm–late.

Southern Edge *Paria Suites Hotel*, Southern Trunk Rd, La Romaine Ⓣ697 1442. This hotel bar-cum-grill has karaoke on Wed, but turns into a popular nightclub at weekends and public holidays with a young party crowd and the usual reggae, soca, hip-hop music policy. One of the few places which has live music – look out for promotion posters and radio ads. Fri–Sat till 4am.

Space La Nouba Southern Trunk Rd, La Romaine Ⓣ697 1165, Ⓦwww.spacetrinidad.com. Purpose-built circular building with a Star-Trek style interior, this is an ever-busy spot, with free drinks on Wednesdays and Fridays (three bottles of Moet for the price of two) and "Cosmopolitan Saturdays", with drinks promotions and changing music selection each week. Regular theme nights, too, from Mexican to Latin. Cover around TT$100. Wed, Fri & Sat 10pm–4am.

Sting San Fernando Bypass/Gulf View, La Romaine, Ⓦwww.stingnightclub.com. One of the south's busiest clubs, in a hangar-like setting that lends itself well to live performances from chutney and soca acts and visiting Jamaican DJs. The club nights are well attended by a young crowd, and it's busiest for free-drink Wednesdays, when women get in free before midnight, and for the regular drinks promotions on Fridays and Saturdays. Music policy ranges from soca, chutney and dancehall to rock and dance music. Cover around TT$100.

Listings

Banks and exchange facilities First Citizens, High St, at Penitence Ⓣ652 2757; Republic, 92–94 Cipero St Ⓣ652 3736; Scotiabank Cipero St, at Rushworth Ⓣ657 7109. All have ATMs. FX Trader at Tropical Trends, La Pique Plaza, High St, or Ground Floor, Gulf City Mall (Ⓣ657 1812), has the best rates on currency exchange.

Hospital San Fernando General, Independence Ave Ⓣ652 3581.

Internet You can get thirty-minute free Internet access a day at Carnegie Free Library (Mon–Fri 8.30am–6pm, Sat 8.30am–noon). Otherwise, try Browwwser's Cyber Café, Coffee St, near Library Corner (Mon–Sat 7am–7pm; TT$10 per hr).

Pharmacy SuperPharm, Gulf View Shopping Centre, Southern Trunk Rd, La Romain Ⓣ653 9934. Mon–Sat 9am–10.30pm, Sun 9am–9pm.

Police The main police station is at the western end of Harris Promenade Ⓣ652 3206.

Post office Carlton Centre, St James St. Mon–Fri 7am–5pm, Sat 8am–2pm.

The southwest peninsula

Trinidad's **southwest peninsula**, often referred to as the "deep south", offers a mix of gritty industrial development and oil towns such as **Point Fortin**, **Siparia and Fyzabad** alongside marvellous drives through the sleepy backwaters of **Erin** and **Cedros**, and the teak and coconut plantations and palm-lined beaches along the Southern Main Road down to **Icacos Point**, where the soft brown sand is backed by red-earth cliffs and lapped by calm seas – an escapist's fantasy and usually deserted apart from the odd fisherman. The atmosphere in this part of Trinidad is irresistibly low key – and this tranquillity, along with the scenery, is its main draw.

Despite its proximity to industrial San Fernando, the hard-to-get-to mangrove swampland of the **Oropuche Lagoon** is a wildlife haven, teeming with birds and seldom visited. The area's main tourist site, though, is the unique **Pitch Lake** at **La Brea**, an interesting and worthwhile excursion. As to culinary exploration, look no further than the roti shops and street-food stalls of **Debe**, one of Trinidad's most wholeheartedly Indian settlements.

Oropuche Lagoon and Rousillac

Spreading back from the Southern Trunk Road some 6km south of San Fernando, the little-visited tidal mangrove swamps of the **Oropuche Lagoon** have been left relatively undisturbed, and are an excellent place to view **butterflies** as well as **birds** such as egrets, black-bellied whistling duck, American bittern, ringed kingfish, white-headed marsh tyrant, pigmy kingfisher, spotted toddy flycatcher and a variety of herons. The best way to explore is by **kayak**: Shamsuddin at Eco Sense Nature Tours (ⓣ766 4035 or 625 5472, ⓦtrinikayak.tripod.com), organizes a superb half-day trip for both novice and advanced kayakers, beginning at 7am at the mouth of the river and returning at lunchtime. Paria Springs (ⓣ622 8826) includes the Oropuche Lagoon on its excellent West Coast Wetlands and Icacos **birding tours**, tending to go to the inland areas of the swamp at dusk.

Just south of Oropuche, **ROUSILLAC** is best known for the landmark **roadside pepper sauce** stall at the community's southwestern end. Run by the Thomas family for the past 25 years, the stack of brightly coloured fine pepper, tamarind and chadon-beni sauces, alongside lime pepper and mango chutneys, is impossible to miss. For **food**, *Bobby's Roti Shop*, just opposite, is the best in the area.

La Brea and around

Meaning pitch in Spanish, **LA BREA** (also called Union village) is usually bypassed by those en route to the **Pitch Lake**. One of the first two oil wells in the world was drilled here in 1857 by the American Merrimac Oil Company, but even with the omnipresent pumping jacks and the fact that the lake has been commercially exploited since the early twentieth century, it's one of Trinidad's more impoverished communities today. Spreading back from the main road towards the sea, La Brea's many colonial-era buildings are well worth a look: the grand old police station and courthouse right at the water's edge are especially impressive, as is the old rum shop at the village's centre (if it hasn't been pulled down by the time you visit), which makes for an atmospheric stop-off for a quick drink. Three kilometres south of town, brown-sand **Vessigny Beach** is popular with Trinis at weekends, with changing rooms and a snack bar, but it's not especially appealing for swimming as a river discharges polluted water into the bay here.

La Brea hit the headlines in 2007 when former Prime Minister Patrick Manning announced his government's intention to build a vast **aluminium smelter** plant just southwest of the village, a deeply controversial move that angered environmentalists and divided the nation. Having removed a staggering 1000 acres of forest before gaining the necessary environmental permission to build the plant, the operation by Alutrint (a joint venture of the T&T government and the private sector) included a highly effective PR campaign to gain local support, from a literacy programme to funding of sports clubs. Detractors argued that few of the promised jobs would materialize, as locals didn't have the necessary technical skills, and that the health risks associated with the smelting process would endanger residents as well as polluting fishing grounds and agricultural land. A court case in 2009 saw construction halted on the grounds that the environmental permits hadn't been granted, and in May 2010 the new People's Partnership government pledged to halt the project for good.

Pitch Lake

Well signposted 1.5km south of La Brea on the Southern Trunk Road, the **Pitch Lake** (daily 9am–5pm; tours TT$50; ☎651 1232) is touted by Trinis as the eighth wonder of the world. It may not look too amazing from a distance, bearing a remarkable resemblance to a car park (albeit one ringed with cashew trees and Bird of Paradise plants), but this 40,000 square metre site is the largest deposit of pitch in the world, and it's well worth taking a tour to learn more about its intriguing complexities. The lake was formed some five to six million years ago, when asphaltic oil flowed into a huge mud volcano here and slowly developed into pitch. Some 180 tonnes are now extracted each day, to be refined into asphalt and used to pave roads the world over. The depth of the lake is estimated at 75m and the level of pitch rises naturally after each excavation – calculations suggest that there's enough to last four or five centuries, but nonetheless the surface is several metres lower than it was when excavation began in 1867.

Amerindians believed that the lake was created to punish a Carib tribe that killed and ate the sacred hummingbird, and were swallowed up in its depths. **Sir Walter Raleigh** was the first European "discoverer", happening upon the lake in 1595, and using the pitch to caulk his ships, while colonial governor Sir Ralph Woodford used it to pave over the capital's dirt roads in 1815, making Port of Spain the first city in the world with asphalt streets. Control of pitch excavation remained in British hands until 1978, when it was taken over by the T&T government.

Although there's nothing stopping you from exploring the lake on your own, it's pretty much essential to take a **guided tour**. Taking up some 25 percent of the total surface, the gooey, tar-like "**mother of the lake**" is not firm enough to walk on and virtually impossible to remove if caught on clothing – soft patches are difficult for the uninitiated to recognize, and guides will guide you through safely. They'll also explain the lake's history and its various geological features, and use a stick to scoop up some of the soft tar, which feeds the pitch, but is in itself useless for making asphalt. Dotted with reeds and water lillies and frequented by wading birds, the pretty pools around the edges of the lake are popular spots for locals to take an evening dip, as their sulphur-rich waters are said to be good for mosquito bites and skin conditions.

The complex on your left as you enter the lake is the base of **authorized guides** (identifiable by their badges and green shirts), and a tour with them also includes a look around the newly refurbished **museum**, which covers the lake's history, from the Amerindian legends to commercial pitch extraction. You'll also be approached by unofficial guides, who will usually negotiate on tour prices and who are based at the yellow snackshop on the left as you enter the lake. Bear in mind that the pitch lake is not the only place hereabouts that asphalt swells from the earth: local **roads** are often excruciatingly bumpy thanks to upward pressure from the underground volcanic eruptions that replenish the lake. Frequent government efforts to level them out are always in vain, so it's advisable to put the brakes on.

Point Fortin

The south's industrial flavour continues at the oil town of **POINT FORTIN**. The tennis courts, golf course and old country club were built for expat managers by Shell (former owners of the refinery and tank farm here), while the suburbs are characterized by sprawling houses with high walls and barking dogs. Point Fortin offers little of interest unless you have a personal interest in the oil industry, and only comes to life after 4pm, when workers come out to lime in the **bars** and hang around the main junction. By far the best time to visit is for the annual **Borough Day** celebrations at the beginning of May: two weeks of Carnival revelry and music and dance competition, including its own Jouvert morning and two-day procession: see Ⓦwww.pointalive.com for more information.

Useful for Borough Day or as an alternative southern base to Sando, Point Fortin's lone **hotel** is the fifteen-room business-oriented *South Western Court*, obliquely opposite the market at 16 Cap-de-Ville Main Rd (Ⓣ648 0075, Ⓦinnsouth.tripod.com; ⑤), with large dining and conference facilities, wi-fi and bright air conditioned rooms with cable TV, some with balconies.

Cedros

The catchall name for the extreme tip of the southwest peninsula, **CEDROS** was first settled by Spaniards, whose influence lingered longer in this isolated region than in the rest of the island; despite an influx of Indian indentured labourers, Spanish was still widely spoken until the 1880s, almost a century after the British had captured Trinidad. During the nineteenth-century heyday of the sugar estates, Cedros was a bustling place, with twice the population of today and no less than seven rum distilleries. These are long-gone, however, and there's little going on here now, though one small-scale industry that has taken off is **bee-keeping**. Of the three apiaries here, **Nature's Best** (Ⓣ690 2061 or 330 5462) manufactures beeswax, royal jelly and a couple of skin and hair care products. If you're interested in viewing the production process and purchasing some products at source, visit owner Chunilal Roopnarine at his home, just off the Southern Main Road before reaching Chatham.

Every bay in Cedros seems to have a picture-postcard **beach**, where the idyllic setting more than compensates for the total lack of facilities. At **Chatham**, a left turn runs about 6km to the south coast, where there's a picturesque and deserted beach of sand and red rocks. The beach at **Granville** is so far off the beaten track – 5.5km from the Southern Main Road through the village of the same name, about halfway between Point Fortin and Icacos Point – that it's often completely deserted. Other spots to hit the sand are **Cedros Bay**, a 10km beach used mainly by local fishermen, while 2km from neighbouring **Fullarton** is the lovely **Columbus Bay**, a 3km stretch that attracts small crowds of bathers at weekends. The view has changed little from the one that greeted the eponymous explorer when he stopped here after landing at Moruga in 1498 (see box, p.198)

Icacos Point

Southwest of Columbus Bay, the views become ever more spectacular as the road winds through a huge coconut plantation, along a causeway through beautiful swampland (look out for **scarlet ibis** at dusk) and down to the sleepy little village of **Icacos** ("ih-*car*-cus"), a tiny place that nonetheless has a mosque, church and Hindu temple. Turn right when you arrive at the village and walk for about twenty minutes along a track bordered by coconut trees to reach **Icacos Point**, Trinidad's southwestern point. It's a faraway spot, with the vague outline of the Venezuelan coast 11km away across the **Serpent's Mouth**, whose swirling waters don't deter the drug smugglers who use the area's beaches to bring in Colombian cocaine via Venezuela, eventually destined for the American mainland. Nine kilometres west out to sea, the craggy silhouette of **Soldado Rock** marks the division between Venezuelan and Trinidadian territorial waters, and is a major breeding site for frigate birds, grey-breasted martins and brown pelicans, and a nesting site of sooty and noddy terns.

To get to Icacos by public transport, you must first go to Point Fortin (see opposite), where taxis leave from School Road near the town's main junction. Paria Springs (☎622 8826) conduct excellent birding **tours** around Icacos Point.

Erin

Blessed with many pretty villages and little-visited beaches, the area east of Cedros and south of Point Fortin and La Brea is known as **ERIN**. Driving from the Cedros side, tiny **Buenos Ayres** is especially attractive, with beautifully dilapidated colonial houses and a couple of good rum shops. **Erin village** (San Francique on many maps) is equally easy on the eye, with old board houses set in flowering gardens and fishing boats bobbing in the bay – this is one of Trinidad's most important fishing villages. During the fishing season (June–Dec), **Puerto Grande** beach buzzes with activity, as fishermen land their catch and weigh it on large old-fashioned scales at the shoreline, discussing prices in discreet tones, while nets are mended or laid out to dry on the sand. It's a fascinating scene, though things are a lot quieter out of season, when the boats move to Moruga to follow the fish. There are a few snack parlours and bars on the waterfront, and **taxis** connect Erin village with San Fernando, Siparia and Point Fortin.

There are a couple more private bathing spots off the San Fernando–Siparia–Erin Road. Some 2km east of Puerto Grande via a signposted turn-off, the pretty cove of **Los Iros** offers calm, clean waters and a small snack parlour and bar; at weekends, whole families descend with Sunday lunch loaded into pots, containers and coolers. Eight kilometres east of Erin village, there's another marvellous beach at **Palo Seco Bay**; turn onto Beach Road by the YKC & Son supermarket in Palo Seco village. Park at the Petrotrin beach club, and walk for fifteen minutes along a dirt road to reach the driftwood-scattered 4km beach.

Debe, Siparia and around

Back at the southern outskirts of San Fernando at **La Romaine**, a left turn by *Paria Suites* hotel brings you onto the San Fernando–Siparia–Erin Road (usually shortened to the SS–Erin Road), which threads through the wholeheartedly

The Festival of La Divina Pastora

Held on the second Sunday after Easter since the early twentieth century, Siparia's **Festival of La Divina Pastora** holds a special place in Trinidad's religious calendar as the only day of the year on which Hindus worship at a Catholic church. The celebrations are centred around the Black Virgin statue, who is decked out in new clothes and carried in procession through the streets to the beat of *tassa* drums, and showered with offerings of gold bracelets, flowers, sweets, fruit, oil and money. The festival is one big street party, with the whole town coming out to celebrate, and culminates in a blow-out feast. Though the statue's origins are hazy, she's said to have been responsible for many miracles, while Spiritual Baptists accredit her with mystical powers. Hindus associate her with the goddess Kali, the destroyer of sorrow, and call her **Siparee Mai** or Mother of Siparia. Before the festival, special barbers set up along the main street to give Hindu children their first haircut, with the locks then being presented as offerings to the statue in the hope of ensuring good luck in the year ahead.

▲ Mural, Siparia

Indian communities of the island's oil belt. Heralded by the riot of clashing shopsigns that wouldn't look out of place in the Delhi of Kolkata, the first town of any size is **DEBE**, credited for the invention of doubles (see p.31), Trinidad's most popular street food. Doubles are sold at the roadside daily from 6am, and as the afternoon cools down, vendors also set up stalls selling a huge variety of fantastic **Indian snacks**, from pholouri (see p.32) to the less widely available *baigani* (sliced aubergine in batter), *saheena* (split-pea and dasheen leaf fritters) and *katchourie*, fried balls of ground channa and spices; sweets include *kurma* dough balls, milk and ginger *barfi*, and *jalebi*, orange syrup in batter. To the north of town on the SS–Erin Road, the excellent **Fun Splash Water Park** (daily 10am–6pm; adults TT$70, children TT$30; ☎647 0350) offers a welcome chance to cool off, with pools and water-slides for adults and kids, plus kayaking and pedal boats; there are picnic areas and snackshops on site. Debe and its neighbour, **PENAL**, are both known for their lively **Diwali celebrations**, when the streets are lit up at nights and Indian dancers and *tassa* drummers provide the entertainment.

Penal slides imperceptibly into **SIPARIA**, though the main street here retains a few attractive **colonial houses** alongside the concrete storefronts. As well as poking around the central produce market, it's worth peeking into the **La Divina Pastora Catholic church** (follow the road that branches off the Southern Trunk Road opposite Republic Bank) to see the **Black Virgin**, a small statue of the Virgin Mary which is carried through the streets as the centrepiece of the annual La Divina Pastora festival (see box, p.193). South of town, the Coora Road/Penal–Quinam Road (turn off the SS–Erin Road just before *KFC* and follow the signs) swings past pumping jacks and through teak plantations to **Quinam Beach**, the south coast's most popular swimming spot, with a wide swathe of sand at low tide overlooked by crumbling cliffs studded with Baptist, Muslim and Hindu prayer flags and devotional figurines. There are several thatch-roofed barbecue pits close to the car park, and lifeguards between 10am and 6pm, but unless you're here at the weekend, when vendors sell snacks and drinks, you'll need to bring your own refreshment.

Fyzabad

North of Siparia, the Siparia–Fyzabad Road strikes north towards the coast; some 5km along, raggle-taggle **FYZABAD** was named by Indian indentured workers after the Uttar Pradesh district where most of them hailed from. After oil was discovered here in 1917, the town became the centre of the emergent labour movement, while the original Indo-Trinidadian Presbyterian community were quickly outnumbered by migrants from Grenada and St Vincent who came to work on the oilfields, and whose descendants make up the majority of the town's population today.

The compact commercial centre clusters around Charlie King Junction, overlooked by the Oil Workers' Trade Union Hall (OWTU) and a statue of the workers' leader **Uriah Butler** (see box below) in his black suit and bowler hat.

Uriah Butler

Trinidad's foremost trade union activist, **Tubal Uriah "Buzz" Butler** was a Grenadian who came to work in Trinidad's oilfields in 1921. After an industrial accident in 1929 left him unfit for oil work, he joined the Moravian Baptist church and became a preacher, developing the rousing oratorical skills that characterized his political career. Disillusioned with Cipriani's Trinidad Labour Party (see p.270) after it failed to support an oilworkers' strike in 1935, he established the **British Empire Workers** (BEW) to further the "heroic struggle for British justice for British Blacks in a British colony".

The BEW campaigned for better pay and working conditions in the oilfields, where many of the managers were white South Africans who had instituted an apartheid-type regime. Among the workers' many grievances were low wages, long working hours and the frequency of industrial accidents, for which there was no compensation. Workers were liable to be dismissed on the spot and, once sacked, a blackballing system made it impossible for them to find work elsewhere.

In June 1937 strikers started a **sit-in** at the Forest Reserve oilfield. The police broke up the protest, and in response the strikers set fire to two wells in the Apex oilfield. When the police arrived at Fyzabad to arrest Butler on a charge of agitation, they found him addressing a large crowd; as they attempted to serve the warrant, a riot broke out. One plain-clothes officer, the deeply unpopular **Charlie King**, fled into a nearby shop, found himself trapped, and jumped from an upstairs window, breaking his leg; the furious crowd burned him alive, and when his colleagues tried to retrieve his body, a British police officer was shot dead. A 1938 calypso caught the popular mood: "Everybody's rejoicing, How they burned Charlie King, Everybody was glad, Nobody was sad, When they beat him and they burned him, In Fyzabad."

Strikes spread like wildfire, and became increasingly violent, with a mounting death toll on both sides. Butler, in hiding after the riot, was soon discovered and sentenced to two years in prison. Nonetheless, the strikes won important concessions: public workers were granted an eight-hour day and a higher minimum wage, while trade unions were given official recognition (though the police continued to harass union officials). On his release in 1939, Butler was given a hero's welcome, but during his imprisonment the BEW had changed, adopting a more mainstream position, and he was soon expelled. In September 1939 Butler was once again incarcerated for sedition, and remained behind bars till the end of World War II.

Butler continued to be politically active after his release in 1945, campaigning in the national elections; but though his party won the largest block of seats in 1950, he was outflanked by the rise of Eric Williams's nationalist politics (see p.270), and his star faded. In remembrance of his role in defending workers' rights, the Princess Margaret Highway linking north and south Trinidad was renamed in his honour in the 1960s. In 1971 the government awarded him the **Trinity Cross** – the highest honour in the land, and June 19, the day of the riots, was declared a public holiday.

Come **Labour Day** (June 19), the street here is blocked to traffic to make way for a street party with a political undercurrent, with fiery speeches and the inevitable calypso and soca blasting from speakers.

The southern central region

South central Trinidad is one of the most impenetrable parts of the island. Running from the west to the east coast through rolling plains of sugar cane, and linking the region's two main towns, **Princes Town** and **Rio Claro**, the Manahambre/Naparima–Mayaro Road is the only transport artery. South of the tarmac though, wild forest predominates. There are few passable roads, signs are almost nonexistent and trying to follow a map is a lesson in frustration – you'll need to ask for directions if driving yourself. Moruga Road is the only decent thoroughfare through this wilderness, running down to the isolated fishing village of **Moruga**.

Maxis and **taxis** are frequent along the Naparima–Mayaro Road from Princes Town to Rio Claro. To go to **Devil's Woodyard** mud volcano – roughly halfway between the two – take a maxi from San Fernando to Princes Town, change here and get another from the main stand direct to Devil's Woodyard. You can also get a maxi or taxi to Moruga from Princes Town. The maxi stand in Princes Town is in the Nipdec Car Park on the main drag just east of the market; the taxi stand is on the main drag next to the market.

Princes Town

East of San Fernando, beyond the blackened chimneys of the **St Madeleine Sugar Factory** – a rather incongruous sight in the midst of rolling fields and lines of palm trees – **PRINCES TOWN** is a mish-mash of new buildings in every imaginable style (check out the colourful murals and reliefs of Hindu gods and the Statue of Liberty on the walls of the **Tyre Warehouse** store), alongside more sober structures such as the grand mosque on the east side of the centre, with its copper dome and steel-plated minarets. On the outskirts of town, the tiny villages of **First**, **Third**, **Fourth** and **Fifth Company** are a legacy of black American soldiers (and former slaves) who fought for the British in the War of 1812 in return for the promise of land; after the British defeat, they were allocated lots in Trinidad. Landing here in 1816, the soldiers managed to establish successful plantations in what had been uncharted jungle, earning themselves the reputation of pioneers, but their complaints about the condition of the land went unheard; British governor Ralph Woodford not only wanted to open up the southern interior, but had a vested interest in keeping radical black soldiers isolated from potentially rebellious slaves elsewhere on the island. There is no village called Second Company – this unit was lost at sea on the voyage to Trinidad.

Devil's Woodyard

Devil's Woodyard sees a regular procession of Trinidadian visitors, but the rather underwhelming series of grey mud hillocks bubbling lazily to the surface don't really live up to their ominous name, bestowed after an 1852 eruption scattered the planks of surrounding houses like matchsticks. Amerindians believed that mud volcanoes were passages between this world and the one below, and that the explosions were the Devil coming out to shake the earth. Even now, local children are pacified by a corrupted version of the tale: at midnight the smartly dressed devil is said to dance on the volcano, and if you're awake to see it you vanish forever. The reality is less dramatic, but if you're curious to see a mud volcano this is the most accessible site, with a children's playground, picnic tables, toilets and competing

Mud volcanoes

Though marked on many maps and promoted as something of a tourist attraction, South Trinidad's many **mud volcanoes** are largely inaccessible – unless you like chopping through dense forest – and in most cases it's not worth the effort. The volcanoes are small mounds mostly less than a metre high that seep grey sulphuric mud, which is believed to be good for skin conditions.

The volcanoes can appear anywhere: in the middle of the bush, in people's back gardens and by the road. They are usually ignored, though those who live near them do so at their peril, for they have a tendency to explode every few years. The most recent and damaging explosion was in **Piparo** in central Trinidad in 1997 (see p.169).

sound systems on Sundays, when the area is a popular liming spot. To get there, turn down the signposted Hindustan Road, 4.5km past Indian Walk off the Naparima–Mayaro Road.

Moruga

South of Princes Town, the Moruga Road threads through untamed forest for 21km before meeting the sea at **MORUGA**, a pretty and very remote village that seems to have changed little since it was settled by black American soldiers after the War of 1812 (see opposite). The bright colours of the old board houses have weathered to pastel shades, but colourful fishing boats still lie on the seashore and fishermen while away their spare hours playing cricket or liming outside the shops-cum-bars on the main road. The seafront Catholic church dominates both the physical surroundings and the life of the villagers. This is a place of strong but heterodox beliefs: Morugans may avow allegiance to Catholicism, to the Spiritual Baptist faith or to Rastafari, but many believe in aspects of all (alongside a sprinkling of obeah; see p.267) and, perhaps thanks to the area's isolation, a palpably religious, well-nigh superstitious, atmosphere pervades.

The brown-sand **Columbus Beach** is decidedly unspooky, however: a gorgeous swathe of sand backed with impressive rocky outcrops, it's named after the fact that Christopher Columbus briefly landed nearby in 1498 (see box, p.198). This is celebrated in the annual **Columbus Festival**, held on August 1, a holiday replaced elsewhere in Trinidad by Emancipation Day, which commemorates the abolition of slavery; controversially, the festival organizers hold the view that without Columbus, the majority of Trinidadians would not have the benefit of living on the island, or of the Catholic faith. Whatever the motivation, the yearly festival brings in much-needed money and provides an excuse for a good party and street bazaar. The festivities take place on the beach, where three boats are decorated as fifteenth-century galleons and locals play the part of Columbus and the Amerindians who greet the explorer peacefully and exchange gifts – hardly an accurate account, but an entertaining spectacle nonetheless.

West of Moruga-proper (turn right at the main crossroads) lies the community of **La Lune**, worth a look for the bizarre lunar-like landscape which lines the riverbed for some miles, known as the "Moonstones of Marac".

Rio Claro

Located on the Naparima–Mayaro Road some 24km east of Princes Town, **RIO CLARO** is the region's administrative hub, and a busy place compared with its surroundings – though that's not saying much in this somnolent corner of the island. The town enjoyed a period of prosperity between 1914 and 1965, when it

Columbus in Trinidad

Christopher Columbus had nearly run out of drinking water when, on July 31, 1498, he sighted the three peaks of the Trinity Hills, which are said to have inspired him to name the island Trinidad. He landed near present-day **Moruga**, where he gathered fresh water from the river. His crew reported seeing fishing implements that had clearly been abandoned in haste, and realized that they had arrived in a region that was already well populated. In fact, there were some 35,000 **Amerindians** (from the Arawak, Shebaio, Nepoio, Carinepagoto and Yao peoples) then living on the island that they called "Ieri", the land of the hummingbird.

Columbus sailed west and encountered the island's residents the next day while anchored off Icacos Point. Twenty-four Amerindians armed with bows and arrows set off in a large canoe to investigate the foreign ship; upon sighting them, Columbus ordered a drum to be played and the sailors to dance, believing the indigenous population would be entertained by this spectacle. However, the Amerindians mistook it for a war dance and rained arrows on the Spaniards; as the latter returned fire, the Amerindians fled. That night, Columbus had little sleep as strong currents here tossed the ship, rocking it so violently that the anchor broke. Bewildered and fearful, Columbus swiftly sailed on, though not before bestowing the name "Serpent's Mouth" for the treacherous waters between Trinidad and Venezuela.

was connected to Trinidad's major cities by the railway, but has been in a long decline ever since the trains stopped running, as young people abandon agricultural work for more profitable jobs in the oilfields and the bigger cities. Rio Claro's connections with its Spanish heritage emerges towards Christmas, as the town's famous **parang** singers (see p.278) come out to entertain the clientele of the local bars and clubs. There's little to occupy you at other times, though on the western outskirts, the grand wedding-cake-pink and ice-blue **Catholic church** and **Hindu temple** with a stepped dome and gold and blue trimmings are worth a look. Maxis to Princes Town and Mayaro leave from the stand in the town centre.

Trinity Hills Wildlife Sanctuary

Some 65 square kilometres of evergreen forest running down to the sea east of the Rio Claro–Guayaguayare Road, the **Trinity Hills Wildlife Sanctuary** encompasses the Trinity Hills and Mount Derrick, the tallest peak in the south at 314m. The hills form a watershed that's vital to the nation's water supply, and was declared a protected reserve in 1900. The many **rivers**, **streams** and **waterfalls** are excellent for bathing, while the lush forests of carat, redwood, cooperhoop and bois pois trees shelter animals such as lappe, agouti, quenk, tatoo and red howler monkeys, as well as rarely seen ocelots, capuchin monkeys, buck deer, armadillos and opossums. The wide variety of birdlife includes the mountain quail dove, while deep caves harbour many species of bats. A 45-minute hike from the road is a **mud volcano** and lake known as **Lagoon Bouffe**, at 100m wide one of Trinidad's largest.

Information on the reserve is hard to find due to its remoteness and the paucity of visitors. Caribbean Discovery Tours (☎624 7281) offer full-day excursions, while tour guide Jalaludin Khan (☎743 1604 or 622 0581) can also advise on trips there and set you up with a local guide. Alternatively, you can drive or mountain bike along the Moruga–Guayaguayare Road (also known as Edward Trace), an exceptionally pretty route which loops through thick virgin forest; you'll rarely see another soul the entire 35km. To avoid any problems at the oilfield gateposts, it's wise to get a free permit from Petrotrin, who have a number of pipelines running through the reserve (call ☎649 5539 or 658 4200 Mon–Sat, on Sun and public hols call ☎649 5500 or 5501).

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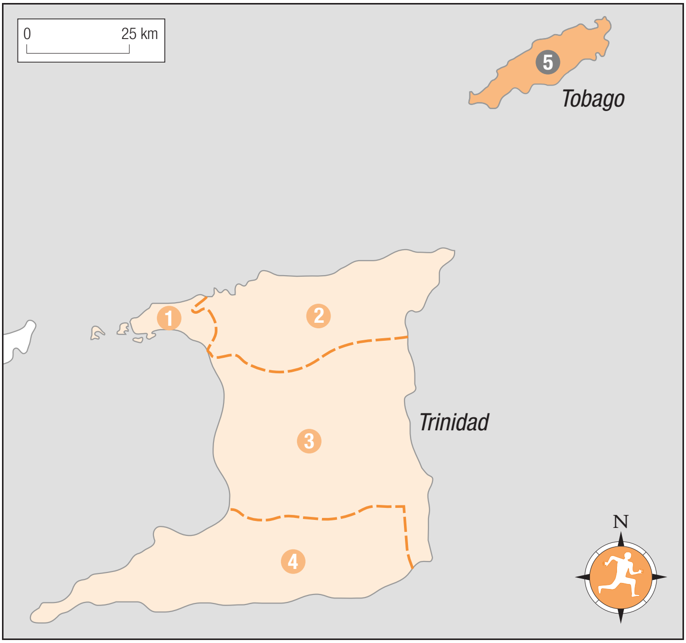
Tobago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CHAPTER 5 Highlights

- ✱ **Creole cooking** Fresh fish, blue food and locally grown pigeon peas are the delectable staples of Tobagonian cooking, served up at restaurants throughout the island. **See p.29**
- ✱ **Explore on horseback** Get a lovely perspective on Tobago's beaches and wetlands, or even ride your horse in the sea. **See p.209**
- ✱ **Sunday School** Dance your cares away every Sunday at this big, brash open air party in Buccoo. **See p.222**
- ✱ **The Kimme Museum** Housed in a stunning mural-decorated building, this private gallery of German artist Luise Kimme is crammed with her beguiling sculptures. **See p.226**
- ✱ **Castara** This picturesque fishing village has embraced tourism without being consumed by it. **See p.243**
- ✱ **Tobago's rainforest** The oldest protected rainforest in the Western Hemisphere makes a sublime location for hiking or birdwatching. **See p.248**
- ✱ **Pirate's Bay** This secluded beach offers some excellent snorkelling in an idyllic setting. **See p.260**

▲ Food stall at Sunday School, Buccoo

5

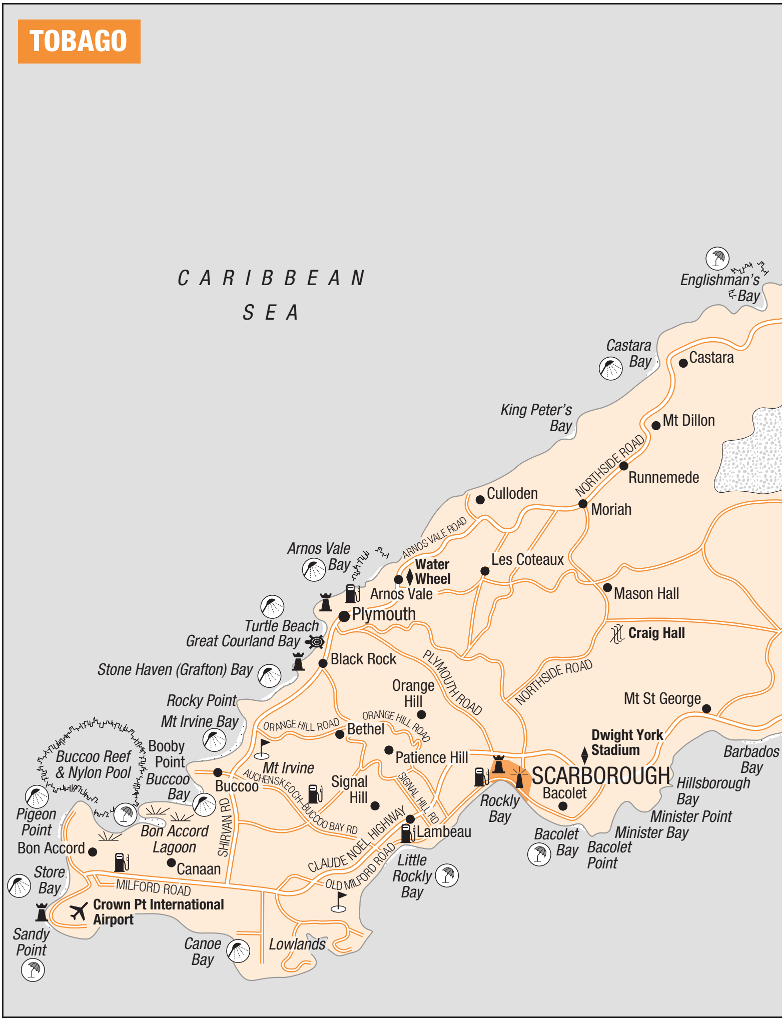
Tobago

An elongated oval just 41 by 14 kilometres, **TOBAGO** manages a surprising diversity within her craggy coastal fringes. Rich in natural allure – deserted palm-lined beaches, lively coral reefs and a wealth of lush rainforest – the island offers something for every taste. Tobago's greatest appeal, however, is that, although **tourism** has definitely taken root here, development has so far been on a low scale when compared with many other Caribbean islands. There are few all-inclusive resorts and none of the high-rise hotels that have blighted many other tropical paradises – and the hustler mentality that exists on more touristy islands is less intense here.

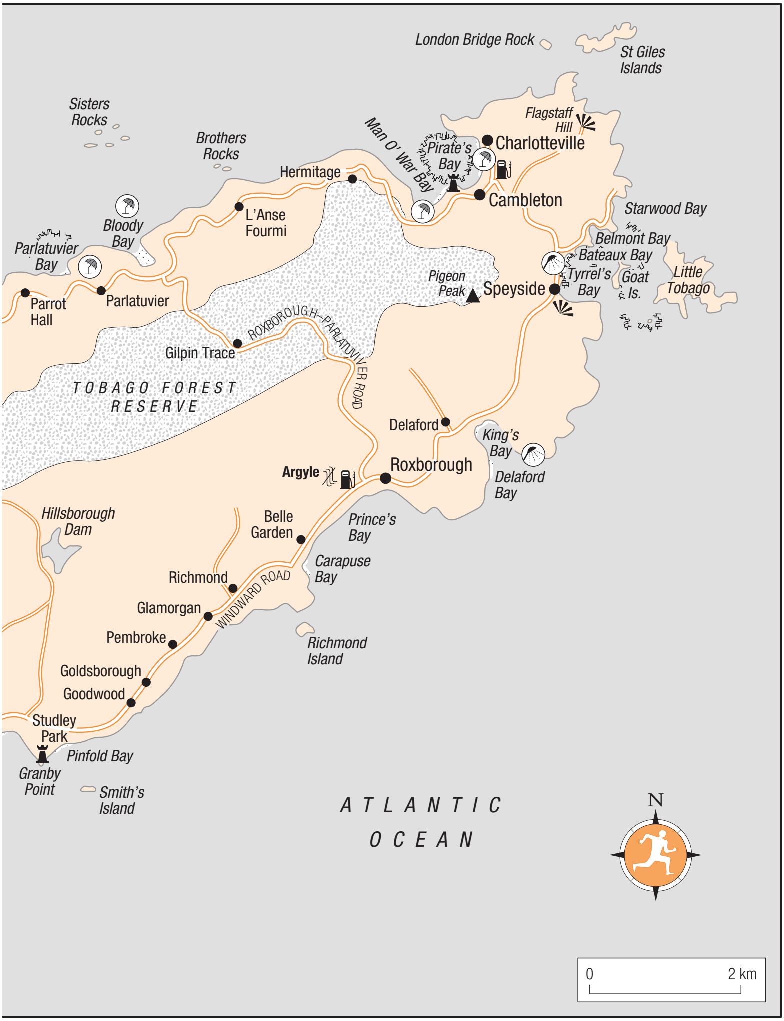
A place where locals and tourists co-exist in an easy equilibrium, with everyone frequenting the same beaches, bars and nightclubs, Tobago's overall vibe is overwhelmingly laidback and relaxing. Moreover, celebrations such as the Easter **goat races** are attended by more Tobagonians than tourists, and local culture is honoured at the annual **Heritage Festival** each August. The uniquely friendly mentality here is best expressed at **Harvest Festivals**, where entire villages open their doors to passing revellers. Things are not completely paradisical, though. There was a time when **crime** was virtually nonexistent here, and although the island is still, relatively speaking, a very safe place to holiday, there have been a few high-profile incidents involving foreign nationals (almost always residents rather than casual visitors). The **security** issue is by no means serious enough to deter a visit, though you should be mindful of taking common-sense precautions.

Physically, Tobago is breathtakingly beautiful; heavy industry is confined to Trinidad, so the beaches here are clean and the landscape left largely to its own devices. The flat coral and limestone plateau of the **southwest tip** is the island's most heavily developed region, with the majority of hotels, bars and restaurants as well as the best – albeit most commercialized – beaches such as **Pigeon Point** and **Store Bay**. There are also quieter stretches of sand along the area's smart hotel coast, where glass-bottom boats head for **Buccoo Reef**, palms sway over the **Mount Irvine** golf course, and hotels around **Plymouth** run night excursions to watch giant **turtles** laying eggs on the beach. Strong currents in this area provide some excellent **surfing** possibilities, with the rough seas between November and February (the height of the tourist season) producing big breakers at Mount Irvine.

But Tobago isn't just sun, sand, surf and the tourist dollar. The commercial clamour of the southwest tip is kept in check by the capital, **Scarborough**, a lively, picturesque port town tumbling down a fort-topped hillside. Pummelled by the dark-green, wave-whipped Atlantic, the island's rugged **windward** (south) **coast** is lined with appealing fishing villages; **Speyside** and **Charlotteville** in the


TOBAGO
CARIBBEAN SEA
Englishman's Bay
Castara Bay
Castara
King Peter's Bay
Mt Dillon
NORTHSIDE ROAD
Runnemede
Culloden
Moriah
ARNOS VALE ROAD
Arnos Vale Bay
Water Wheel
Les Coteaux
Arnos Vale
Mason Hall
Plymouth
Turtle Beach
Great Courland Bay
Craig Hall
Stone Haven (Grafton) Bay
Black Rock
PLYMOUTH ROAD
NORTHSIDE ROAD
Orange Hill
Rocky Point
Mt Irvine Bay
Mt St George
ORANGE HILL ROAD
ORANGE HILL ROAD
Bethel
Dwight York Stadium
Buccoo Reef & Nylon Pool
Booby Point
Patience Hill
Barbados Bay
Mt Irvine
Buccoo Bay
Buccoo
AUCHENSKEOCH-BUCCOO BAY RD
Signal Hill
SIGNAL HILL RD
SCARBOROUGH
Hillsborough Bay
Bacolet
Pigeon Point
Rockly Bay
Minister Point
SHIRVAN RD
Bon Accord Lagoon
CLAUDE NOEL HIGHWAY
Lambeau
Minister Bay
Bon Accord
Bacolet Bay
Bacolet Point
Canaan
Little Rockly Bay
Store Bay
MILFORD ROAD
OLD MILFORD ROAD
Crown Pt International Airport
Sandy Point
Canoe Bay
Lowlands

remote eastern reaches have **coral reefs** as ornate as you'll find anywhere in the Caribbean and **scuba diving** is a burgeoning industry. Tobago is an excellent and inexpensive place to learn to dive, and there's plenty of challenging drift diving for the more experienced, while the many reefs within swimming distance of the beaches make for fantastic **snorkelling**. Coral sands and glassy Caribbean waters along the **leeward** (north) **coast** provide some of Tobago's finest beaches; some, like **Englishman's Bay**, are regularly deserted, while at **Parlatuvier** and **Bloody Bay**, you'll share the sand with local fishermen. **Castara**, meanwhile, holds the only real tourist infrastructure along the Caribbean coast, with a host of guesthouses and places to enjoy the excellent fresh fish.


London Bridge Rock
St Giles Islands
Sisters Rocks
Brothers Rocks
Man O' War Bay
Flagstaff Hill
Charlotteville
Pirate's Bay
Hermitage
Cambleton
Starwood Bay
L'Anse Fourmi
Bloody Bay
Parlatuvier Bay
Belmont Bay
Bateaux Bay
Tyrrel's Bay
Goat Is.
Little Tobago
Pigeon Peak
Speyside
Parrot Hall
Parlatuvier
ROXBOROUGH–PARLATUVIER ROAD
Gilpin Trace
TOBAGO FOREST RESERVE
Delaford
King's Bay
Delaford Bay
Argyle
Roxborough
Hillsborough Dam
Belle Garden
Prince's Bay
Carapuse Bay
Richmond
WINDWARD ROAD
Glamorgan
Pembroke
Richmond Island
Goldsborough
Goodwood
Studley Park
Pinfold Bay
Granby Point
Smith's Island
ATLANTIC OCEAN
N
0
2 km

The landscape of the eastern interior rises steeply into the hillocks and rolling bluffs which make up the central **Main Ridge**. These mountains shelter the **Forest Reserve** – the oldest protected rainforest in the western hemisphere – an abundant tangle of mist-shrouded greenery dripping down to fabulous coastlines, often with neither building nor road to interrupt the flow. Ornithologists and naturalists flock in for the **bird** and **animal** life that flourishes here; David Attenborough filmed parts of his celebrated *Trials of Life* series at **Little Tobago**, a solitary seabird sanctuary off the coast of Speyside. For slightly less committed nature-lovers, the squawking, chirruping forest offers plenty of opportunities for birdwatching or a splash in the icy **waterfalls**.

Crime and safety

There was a time when crime of any sort was virtually unheard of in Tobago, but several high-profile robberies and attacks in recent years have tarnished the island's reputation as a safe haven in the Caribbean. Most of the victims have been expat residents rather than people on holiday, and many put these crimes down to disputes and simmering tensions between the newcomers and locals rather than opportunism. Nonetheless, it has to be said that crime statistics have risen here in recent years, and while some Tobagonians still leave their front doors unlocked and their parked cars open, visitors are well advised to take the **common-sense precautions** described on p.44 to avoid potential problems.

It may sound obvious, but it pays to be sensible about how you conduct yourself. Though tourism officials are loathe to acknowledge it, many visitors do come to Tobago with holiday romance or a spot of weed-smoking in mind, and it goes without saying that inviting a stranger – no matter how friendly they seem – back to your hotel or villa after Sunday School or for a smoke on the beach carries with it inherent risks. Equally, as robberies have occurred at isolated waterfalls and on beaches such as Back Bay, it makes sense not to visit remote places alone; instead, go in a group or as part of an organized tour. Having a mobile phone handy in case of emergencies is a sensible precaution.

Another main concern of late has been break-ins at **villas**, whose often idyllic locations, in the middle of nowhere with only the birds for company, are irresistible to tourists and criminals alike. If you do stay in a villa, bear in mind that those clustered together in a resort-style complex, complete with gates and security guards, are obviously the safest choice. Always ask about **security measures** such as alarm systems, outside lighting, window locks or grilles and safes before renting, and make sure that the place you're staying has a telephone (you might want to write important numbers beside it for quick reference). Always lock doors and windows securely before going out and when retiring for the night, and leave a few lights on, too. And finally, should the worst happen, don't offer any kind of resistance to thieves. Whether you're being mugged or burgled, the chances are that the assailant or intruder will be armed with something like a knife or machete, and there have been incidents where people have been hurt trying to defend themselves. Call the **police** on 999 as soon as possible; in addition, there are police stations at Scarborough (☎639 2512), Crown Point (☎639 0042 or 9872), Old Grange (☎639 8888), Moriah (☎660 0029 or 0100), Roxborough (☎660 4333) and Charlotteville (☎660 4388).

Some history

Tobago has long been a hotly contested property. The original **Carib** population fiercely defended their paradisical *Tavaco* (the name is derived from the Indian word for tobacco) against other Amerindian tribes, and thwarted European colonization throughout the late 1500s and early 1600s. English sailors staked Britain's claim in 1580, tacking a flag to a tree trunk during a water stop en route to Brazil, and in 1641, England's King Charles I presented Tobago to his godson James, the Duke of Courland (in modern Latvia). A group of **Latvians** arrived a year later, but their settlement at Plymouth suffered constant attacks from the Caribs, and in 1658 was taken by the Dutch, who called it Nieuw Vlissingen. Twenty years later, the Courlanders left for good, and in the following years, the Amerindian population slowly petered out. Meanwhile, the belligerent shenanigans of the Dutch, English and French turned the coasts of Tobago into a **war zone**, with the island changing hands 31 times before 1814.

During this period, forts sprang up at every vantage point, and Tobago descended into turmoil, plundered by **pirates** and officially declared a no-man's-land in 1702. In 1762, however, the British took decisive action and sent a powerful fleet to

Tobago, taking possession of the island with swift precision. Sustained by the promise of stability that came with firm British control, **plantation culture** began in earnest, with the island developed into a highly efficient sugar, cotton and indigo factory. Africans were shipped in to work as slaves, with around 3000 toiling on the plantations by 1772, under the control of less than three hundred Europeans. The economy flourished and, by 1777, the island's eighty or so estates had exported 1.5 million pounds of cotton, as well as vast quantities of rum, indigo and sugar. The numerical might of the slave population led to many bloody **uprisings**, with planters doling out amputations and death by burning and hanging to the rebels.

Once the Act of Emancipation was passed in 1834, most of Tobago's African population took to the bush to plant small-scale farms or established coastal fishing communities, though some continued to work the estates as free men and women. When Britain removed its protective tariffs on sugar sales, however, Tobago's unmechanized industry was unable to compete with other, more efficient producers. A severe hurricane in 1847, along with the collapse of the West India Bank (which underwrote the plantations), marked the beginning of the end for the island's sugar estates.

In the aftermath of the **Belmanna Riots** (see p.254), Tobago's Legislative Council relinquished its tenuous rule, and the island became a Crown Colony in 1879. Having reaped all it could from the island and its sugar industry, England had little further need for troublesome, ailing Tobago. In 1899, Tobago was made a ward of Trinidad, effectively becoming the bigger island's poor relation with little control over her own destiny. With the **collapse of the sugar industry**, the islanders fell back upon other crops, planting the acres of limes, coconuts and cocoa that still remain in patches today. Boosted by the arrival of **free Africans** in the mid-1800s, the black population clubbed together to farm the land, tending their food crops in the efficient **"Len-Hand" system** of shared labour that is still celebrated during Harvest Festivals. By the early 1900s Tobago was exporting fruit and vegetables to Trinidad, and was granted a single seat on the legislative council in 1927.

In 1963, **Hurricane Flora** (see p.249) razed whole villages and laid waste to most of the island's crops; the ensuing restructuring programme saw the first tentative steps towards developing a tourist industry. By 1980, the island had her sovereignty partially restored when the **Tobago House of Assembly** (THA) was reconvened, but it had authority only over the island's more mundane affairs while the main decisions were still made in Trinidad. Although Tobago now has a stronger profile in the republic's affairs, the island is still perceived to be looked down on by bigger Trinidad, much to the resentment of the local populace.

Whether tourism will continue to be Tobago's main earner is questionable. Development projects abound, many slated for some of the island's most pristine and lovely stretches of coast, and following a multi-million dollar deal signed in 2005, Canadian-owned Petro-Canada have discovered natural gas reserves in an area roughly 10km north of Tobago known as **Block 22**. It remains to be seen whether both gas extraction and rampant construction will erode the very things that attract tourists to Tobago in the first place.

Arrival

All flights to Tobago land at **Crown Point International Airport**, an airy complex that's small enough to feel overwhelmed by the arrival of a single jet. The little row of shops opposite the terminal building holds a newsagent selling mobile phone top-ups and Companion **phonecards**; a b-mobile shop selling local SIM cards; and two restaurants.

The hotels in Crown Point are all within walking distance of the airport. For **airport transfers** to more distant destinations, there is a taxi price list on the wall of the arrivals lounge. The rates are used by all the **licensed taxi drivers** who meet each flight – they're high, but not wildly so; note that fares increase by ten percent after 10pm. If you're on a budget, you can cross the street and haggle with the sometimes-cheaper unlicensed drivers or catch a route taxi (see opposite) or bus (see p.207) going to Scarborough.

Some visitors also come to Tobago via the **ferry** (see Basics, p.25) from Port of Spain which docks at Scarborough.

Information and practicalities

For **information**, head to the tourist office, the last shop on the left of the row opposite the airport (daily 6am–10pm; ☎639 0509). Staff can advise on accommodation, transport and activities, and have free **maps** of Tobago and copies of the free, tourist-oriented magazines such as the useful *What's On* and *Discover Tobago*.

There's a **bureau de change** upstairs in the airport terminal, and a branch of Republic Bank (Mon–Thurs 8am–3pm, Fri 8am–1pm & 3–5pm) with an **ATM** in the shops opposite the arrivals area; there's also a freestanding ATM on the left-hand side as you leave the airport complex. Other ATMs in the area are located at the RBTT bank on Airport Road, just past the turn-off to Store Bay, and at Penny Savers supermarket in Canaan. There are also several banks in Scarborough.

Most hotels offer **net access**, and a growing number of bars and cafés have wi-fi, too. The majority of internet cafés are in the Crown Point area, offering access for around TT$20 per hour. In Crown Point, try Rocs, Crown Point Shopping Complex, Store Bay Local Road; and Clothes Wash Café, in the RBTT complex, Airport Road. In Canaan, there's Rontech Computers, above Penny Savers supermarket, Milford Road; in Lowlands, try the Art Café, on the main road opposite the turn-off to Canoe Bay. In Scarborough, there's MG Photo Studios in the NIB Mall, and J Putertech, 20 Burnett St, opposite James Park.

If you need to do **laundry**, try the Clothes Wash Café (Mon–Sun 8am–9pm; see above). Late-opening **pharmacies** include Dove Drugs, in the Real Value Plaza on Auchenskeoch–Buccoo Bay Road, Carnbee, which runs from Claude Noel Highway to Shirvan Road (Mon–Sat 8am–7pm, Sun and public holidays 9am–noon; ☎639 2976). In Scarborough, there's Scarborough Drugs, opposite *KFC* on the corner of Carrington Street and Wilson Road (Mon–Sat 8am–8pm, Sun and public holidays 8am–noon; ☎639 4161). At the time of writing, construction of

Supermarkets

If you're staying in self-catering accommodation and plan cooking for yourself, bear in mind that supermarkets outside of Western Tobago sell only the most basic items. Even if you're staying in Castara or further afield, it's best to stock up here on your way from the airport. The best **supermarket** is Penny Savers (Mon–Sat 8am–8.30pm, Sun 8am–1pm), on Milford Road at the Canaan end; it's competitively priced, well stocked and has lots of imported foods. There's another branch in Carnbee, on the Auchenskeoch–Buccoo Bay Road, and one on Wilson Road in Scarborough. Also in the capital, Cost Cutters on the Plymouth side of Wilson Road, is well stocked and inexpensive. Morshead Delicatessen on Buccoo Road, off Shirvan Road (Mon–Fri 8am–6pm, Sat 8am–7pm, Sun 8am–noon) sells a wealth of imported goods, including cold meats and cheeses, though prices are high.

Driving times

While the roads around Scarborough can be busy during peak times, approximate **driving times** are:

Crown Point to Scarborough – 15min
Roxborough to Speyside – 30min
Speyside to Charlotteville – 10min
Scarborough to Plymouth – 20min
Plymouth to Bloody Bay – 1hr
Scarborough to Castara – 45min
Bloody Bay to Roxborough – 45min
Crown Point to Castara – 1hr

Tobago's new **hospital** in Lambeau was still underway, and until it's completed, the only hospital is the crumbling facility just below the fort complex in Scarborough (☎639 2551 or 2552). For an ambulance, call ☎990. If you need a **doctor**, try any of the physicians practising at the Triangle Building, Crooks River, Scarborough (☎639 1115).

Getting around

Tobago's **public transport** system is improving. Although buses and **maxi taxis** (with blue bands in Tobago) are not that frequent to more remote corners of the island or at the weekends, the extensive **route taxi** network is a convenient alternative. Legions of route taxis ply the western portion of the island; travelling between Crown Point, Buccoo, Mount Irvine or Plymouth simply involves standing on the correct side of the road for your destination, sticking out your hand and asking the taxi driver where they're heading. Traffic is lighter along the windward and leeward sides of the island, but even here you should find something going in your direction if you're patient.

If you're based in the Crown Point area and heading further afield via public transport, say to Castara, Charlotteville or Speyside, you'll need to travel into Scarborough, where route taxis and buses depart to the rest of the island; see p.235 for details. It's best to get an early start, since many of the services to outlying towns and villages leave early in the morning, with a significant lull during the middle part of the day.

If you do plan on exploring a lot, however, it's well worth **renting a car** to avoid the hassles and long waits associated with route and maxi taxis or buses. Note that the speed limit is 30mph/50kmph throughout the island, even on the highway.

Buses

The cheapest way to get around the island is on Tobago's **public bus system**, the Public Transport Service Company (PTSC). An hourly shuttle service operates between Crown Point (there's a stop just outside the airport complex) and the island's main **depot** on Sangster Hill Road in Scarborough; buses leave at roughly half past the hour from Crown Point and on the hour from Scarborough from 5am to 9pm.

From Scarborough, buses run **along the windward coast** to Mount St George, Studley Park, Glamorgan, Argyll Falls, Roxborough, Delaford, King's Bay, Speyside and Charlotteville (Mon–Fri 4.30am, 6.30am, 9am, noon, 2.30pm, 4.30pm & 6.30pm, Sat 6am, 9am, 1pm & 5pm, Sun 9am, 12.30pm, 2pm & 5.30pm). The **leeward coast** route extends from Scarborough to L'Anse Fourmi via Mason Hall, Moriah, Castara, Englishman's Bay, Parlatuvier and Bloody Bay (Mon–Fri 5.30am, 6.30am, 7am, 8.30am, 12.30pm, 4.30pm & 6pm, Sat 6am, 9am, 1pm & 5pm, Sun 9am, 12.30pm, 2pm & 5.30pm). Some buses also go from

Scarborough to Crown Point via the Plymouth Road, passing Plymouth, Mount Irvine and Black Rock (Mon–Fri, 5am, 6am, 7am, 8.30am, 10am, noon, 3pm, 4pm & 5pm). Fares range between TT$2 and TT$8; all tickets must be **pre-purchased** as drivers will not accept cash; they are available from the shops opposite the airport complex, the bus station in Scarborough or from bars and mini-marts throughout the island. For more information on bus services, call ⓣ635 1470.

Taxis

As well as using **taxis** for short journeys, you can also hire one for exploring the island for all or part of a day. This can often work out cheaper than renting a car and you'll get a commentary on the island along the way. Taxi drivers congregate

Organized tours

Tobago has a bewildering number of **tour companies and guides**, with options ranging from the highly qualified and experienced to the downright charlatan (note that certified guides have an ID badge issued by the Tobago House of Assembly). It's worth spending time considering the options before parting with your cash. Several established companies offer rather sterile island tours covering Tobago's main sights, which are great if you want a hassle-free overview of the island. **Full-day tours** of eight hours or so almost always include lunch and cost US$70–90 per person; half-day tours hover at around US$50 for four to five hours. Most people book through reps who visit the main hotels or trawl the beaches, but you can sign up individually as well.

One of the best all-round companies is Castara-based **Alibaba** (ⓣ635 1017 or 686 7957, ⓦwww.alibaba-tours.com): in addition to the standard rainforest and island trips (Little Tobago and such) they organize full-day snorkelling, fun fishing and beach barbeques, and island sightseeing tours – which can be arranged to include whatever you want to see (half day US$60, full day including lunch US$80). Also recommended is **Frankie's Tours** in Mount Irvine (ⓣ631 0369, ⓦwww.frankietours-tobago.com), who run a varied selection of fishing, hiking and sightseeing tours; and for a reliable and enthusiastic operator in the Crown Point area, try **S. McLetchie Tours** (ⓣ639 0265, ⓦwww.tobago-adventure.com), also good for birdwatching. Based in Roxborough, **Ellis Clarke** (ⓣ682 9147 or 758 6757, ⓔellistours@yahoo.com) is another excellent guide, offering island tours, forest walks, jeep safaris and reef snorkelling.

Hiking and wildlife tours

Genial **Harris McDonald** (ⓣ639 0513, ⓦwww.harris-jungle-tours.com) conducts half-day (and night-time) rainforest and birdwatching walks, including breakfast, and full-day excursions to the rainforest, with some snorkelling at Angel Reef. Renowned naturalist **David Rooks** (ⓣ631 1630, ⓦwww.rookstobago.com) leads informed, professional and popular tours to Little Tobago and the rainforest. Darren Henry of **Nature Lovers** (ⓣ639 4559 or 767 9298, ⓦwww.tobagobirding.com) is a trained forester and licensed tour guide who offers birdwatching in the forest reserve, Little Tobago, the Grafton bird sanctuary and the Bon Accord wetlands. Another good bet for birding, **Peter Cox Nature Tours** (ⓣ751 5822, ⓦwww.tobagonaturetours.com), offers the same birding destinations, and is also good for turtle-watching (see p.230) during the laying season. He also offers night-time rainforest walks (great for seeing nocturnal creatures such as armadillos and owls) and trips tailored for children in which you explore forest rivers and pools home to wabeen and crayfish. More information on Forest Reserve tour guides can be found on p.250.

If you're interested in **hiking**, **Mark Puddy** (ⓣ639 4931) leads fabulous offbeat trips to seldom-visited rivers and waterfalls as well as the forest reserve; the very reasonable rates include transport to and from your hotel as well as drinks and a light lunch.

at the airport; you can also call the Tobago Owner Drivers' Association (ⓣ639 2692) or Tobago Taxi Cab Co-Operative (ⓣ639 2659). Of individual drivers, try Vernon Abraham (ⓣ639 4475) or Liz Lezama (ⓣ639 2309).

Car and bike rental

Most of the international **car rental** firms – as well as the local operators with two or three vehicles to rent – are clustered around the airport. You'll pay US$40–50 per day for a car or jeep. Local operators tend to be cheaper than their international counterparts, but the smaller the company, the less likely you are to be offered 24-hour assistance and adequate coverage in case of an accident: the most reliable among them are Sherman's, based in Lambeau (ⓣ639 2292, ⓦwww.shermansrental.com), or

Boat tours, activities and cruises

A **cruise** is one of the best ways to appreciate Tobago's gorgeous coastline and get some excellent snorkelling. Several operators work the waters – their prices for a full-day trip vary little (usually around US$90 per person for a 6–8hr cruise) and usually include lunch, snorkelling at Englishman's Bay or other similarly deserted coves, and an open bar; half-day, or sunset and moonlight dinner trips are also on the roster of most operators. Alibaba and Frankie's (see above) are two of the main operators, while *Island Girl* (ⓣ639 7245, ⓦwww.sailtobago.com) is a large catamaran and the only vessel offering sailing (wind permitting) rather than just motor-power. **Glass-bottom boat** tours of Buccoo Reef leave from Store Bay, Pigeon Point and Buccoo and are a more raucous experience, often accompanied by loud music. Touts prowl all the main beaches. Of other options, Charlotteville-based Tobago Sea Kayak Experience (ⓣ660 6186, ⓦwww.seakayaktobago.com) run a programme of full- and half-day sea kayaking trips for both novices and those with experience in both Pigeon Point and Man O' War Bay; their 6-hour adventure trip also includes a forest reserve walk.

Chartering a **sport fishing boat** is exciting but expensive; rich pickings of marlin, sailfish, tuna and dolphin are caught year-round. A speedy boat accommodating up to six and equipped with rods, tackle and bait will cost in excess of US$400 per half day, US$700 for a full day; try local character Captain "Frothy" de Silva's boat *Hardplay* (ⓣ639 7108, ⓦwww.hardplay.net). Grand Slam charters (ⓣ639 9961) also offer spinning and fly-fishing.

Motorbike and mountain bike tours

On-road and off-road **motorbike tours** are organized by Trail Dogz (ⓣ639 6511, ⓦwww.traildogztobago.com), for about US$100 per full-day. For those seeking a slightly gentler pace, mountain bike **tours** are offered by Slow Leak Mountain Tours (ⓣ332 5872, ⓦwww.tobagomountainbike.com), the selection of trips costing US$30 –50, from an easy no-hills ride around the Bon Accord lagoon to an extreme downhill ride from Moriah. Alternatively, Mountain Biking Tobago (ⓣ639 9709, ⓦwww.mountainbikingtobago.com) offer a similar roster of tours for both beginners and serious riders (US$40–50).

Horse riding

Friendship Riding Stables in Caanan (ⓣ660 8563, ⓦwww.friendshipridingstables.com) arrange beach rides along Canoe Bay and Kilywgyn beach (US$46), as well as lessons. In Buccoo, **Being with Horses** (ⓣ639 0953, ⓦwww.being-with-horses.com) is a wonderful small-scale operation with a more alternative attitude (saddles are optional), offering rides (US$50) around the Buccoo headland, Bon Accord wetlands and Buccoo beach, as well as the chance to swim your mount across the bay.

KCNN, New Grange (Ⓣ682 2888, Ⓦwww.tobagocarhire.com), both of which offer airport pick-ups and delivery to hotels. Of the international names, Thrifty (Ⓣ639 8507, Ⓦwww.thrifty.com) has efficient service and a wide selection of vehicles. There are **petrol stations** along Milford Road in Bon Accord, in Scarborough, the Claude Noel Highway on the junction with Orange Hill Road, Plymouth, Carnbee (take the first right from Shirvan Road or the turn-off from the highway marked for Auchenskeoch), Roxborough and Charlotteville. Opening hours are generally Mon–Sat 7am–8pm and Sun 7am–noon.

Car rental firms occasionally rent **motorbikes** and **scooters** for around US$30 a day. Be especially careful to check the condition of your bike and helmet before you ride away, as some are less than perfect.

Bicycles are good for short hops, though the daytime heat is intense and road-riding can feel a bit precarious. The mountain-biking tour companies listed on p.209 can rent bikes, as can Island Bikes, Bon Accord (Ⓣ639 8587).

Crown Point and Bon Accord

Tobago's flat, low-lying **southwest tip** is the island's most heavily developed, accessible and populated region, home to the vast majority of its hotels, restaurants and nightclubs, as well as its most popular beaches – **Store Bay** is just a couple of minutes on foot from the airport, and **Pigeon Point** ten minutes further. The terrain between the two is jam-packed with all the familiar tourist trappings – craft stalls, restaurants and endless resort hotels – and many people never make it any further into the island. This highly commercialized concrete hotchpotch lacks aesthetic charm, but the concentration of facilities and activities offers practical convenience as well as Tobago's most energetic vibe.

Directly east of Crown Point, Airport Road serves as a rough boundary line between Crown Point and **Bon Accord**, directly east and distinguishable only by its preponderance of residential streets threading towards the lovely Bon Accord wetlands.

Accommodation

The sheer amount of **accommodation** in the Crown Point area makes choosing a place to stay mind-boggling. Space is at a premium here, with many hotels and guesthouses built back-to-back with little individuality and scant regard for aesthetics. On the other hand, the high competition keeps prices fairly low, and the absence of ugly high-rise developments makes things feel much less crowded than they actually are. You're also in walking distance of the busiest beaches, restaurants and bars, and can often stroll straight from the airport tarmac to your room. Hotels bordering the runway get some aircraft noise, though there are too few flights for this to be a great problem. Bon Accord, meanwhile, holds a few quieter options, as does Store Bay Local Road.

Therapies, treatments and yoga

A wide range of alternative **therapies and treatments**, including Ayurvedic and Thai Yoga massages, reflexology, ear candling and shiatsu (all TT$360 per hr and $480 for 1hr 30min) are available at the Holistic Treatment Centre, *Kariwak Village* hotel, Crown Point (see opposite), which also has a programme of early morning yoga and t'ai chi classes held in a lovely open-sided, thatched-roofed ajoupa surrounded by gardens and waterfalls.

Bananaquit Store Bay Local Rd, Bon Accord ⓣ639 9733, 368 3539, ⓦwww.bananaquit.com. Set around a shaded grassy courtyard, these eclectic studios and apartments have plenty of character, with rattan furnishings and kitchenettes or full kitchen. All have a/c, fan and cable TV, and there's free access to the pool at the adjacent *Store Bay Resort*. ⑤

Candles in the Wind 145 Anthony Charles Crescent, Bon Accord Estate ⓣ631 5335, ⓦwww.candlesinthewind.8k.com. This very friendly hotel in a quiet, mainly residential part of Bon Accord contains eight en-suite rooms with cable TV and a/c; there's also an attic dorm with bunk beds (US$25) for those on a budget. There are two fully equipped shared kitchens and laundry facilities on site, and wi-fi available. ③

Coco Reef Airport Rd, Crown Point ⓣ639 8571, in US and Canada 800/221 1294, ⓦwww.cocoreef.com. This peach-painted enclave is Crown Point's largest hotel and the most resort-like on the island, with high perimeter walls enclosing the grounds and man-made white sand beach. Two restaurants, two bars, health spa, tennis courts, pool, water-sports and rooms with every associated frippery offer opulence at the expense of atmosphere. ⑨

Conrado Pigeon Point Rd, Pigeon Point ⓣ639 0145, ⓕ639 0755, ⓦwww.conradobeachresort.com. The closest you can stay to Pigeon Point and one of the relatively few hotels in Tobago next to the beach – indeed, you can almost feel the ocean spray from the expansive balconies that come with the sea-view rooms. The rooms are modestly proportioned, but come with en-suite bathrooms, a/c and cable TV. Good breakfasts (included) and an on-site restaurant/bar right by the sand. ④

Crown Point Beach Hotel Store Bay Rd, Crown Point ⓣ639 8781, ⓦwww.crownpointbeachhotel.com. Expansive hotel on the westerly side of Store Bay Beach. The modern, comfortable rooms all have sea-facing views, as do the more private cabanas dotting the garden. Both have kitchenette, a/c, phone, cable TV and small patio/balcony, and there's a pool, restaurant and tennis courts on site. Usually busy with a Trinidadian/European crowd. ⑤

Crusoe's Apartments Store Bay Local Rd, Bon Accord ⓣ639 7789, ⓦcrusoes.net. Spacious self-contained one- and two-bedroom apartments, tastefully decorated in blue and orange with a/c, cable TV, fully equipped kitchen and pool; wi-fi also available. Friendly and very good value. ③

Douglas Apartments John Gorman Trace, at Milford Rd ⓣ639 7723, ⓦwww.douglastobago.com. Sparkling clean, spacious one- and two-bedroom apartments, each with a lounge, full kitchen, patio, a/c and TV – the three loft rooms sleeping five are especially nice. Pool and a friendly family atmosphere. Car rental is available on site. ③

The Hummingbird 128 Store Bay Local Rd, Crown Point ⓣ/ⓕ635 0241, ⓦwww.thehummingbirdonline.com. This intimate, family-run hotel has a pool, restaurant and bar and ten spotless en-suite rooms named after tropical flowers – all have a/c, fridge and cable TV, and some have a kitchenette, too. The likeable Anglo-Trinidadian owners are a useful source of information. ③

James Holiday Resort Sandy Point, Crown Point ⓣ639 8084. An inexpensive option in Sandy Point, this motel-style guesthouse has plain but pleasant rooms with a/c, cable TV and fridge, while some have kitchenette with microwave. Pool, wi-fi, on-site mini-mart and car rental, too. ⑤

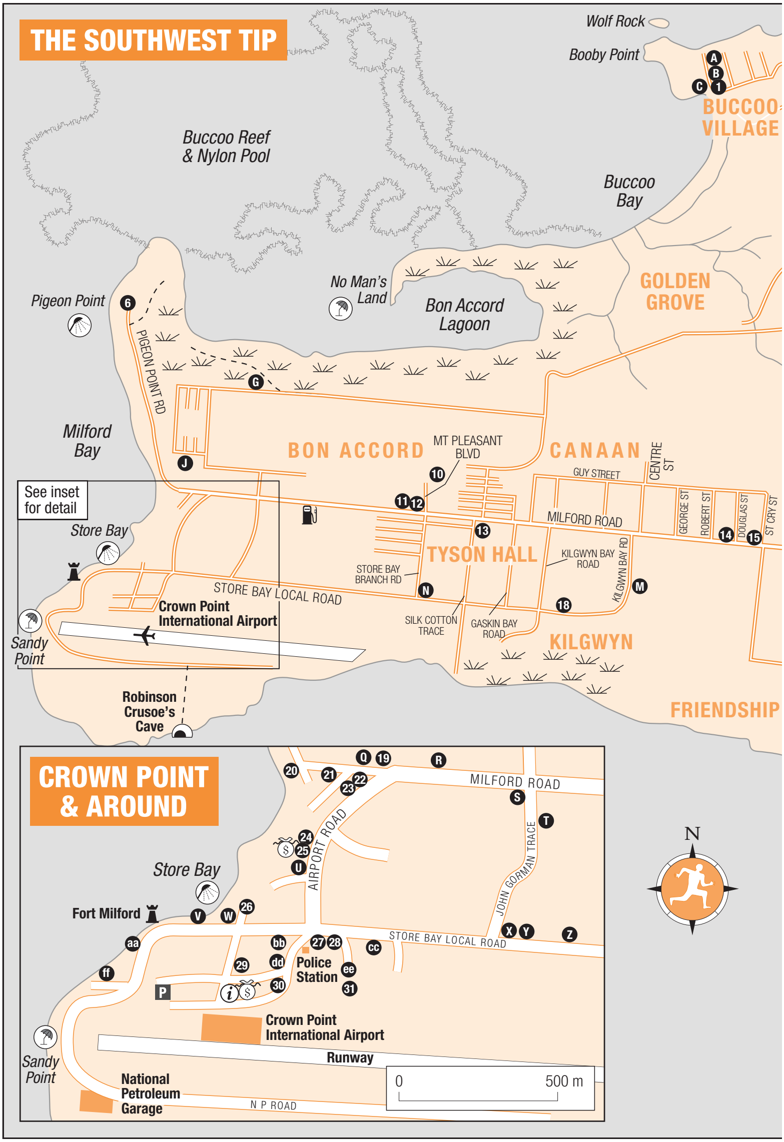
Jimmy's Holiday Resort Airport Rd, Crown Point ⓣ639 8292, ⓦjimmysresort.com. One-, two- and three-bedroom self-contained apartments with a very central location along Airport Rd, a five-minute walk from Store Bay Beach and central to all the bars and restaurants. Functional, clean but a bit drab and showing their age, the apartments have sitting room, kitchenette, a/c, TV and phone, and there's a swimming pool and well-stocked mini-mart on site. ③

Johnston Apartments Store Bay Rd, Crown Point ⓣ639 8915, ⓕ631 5112, ⓦwww.johnston-apts.com. Right above Store Bay and sharing the pool and restaurant of its larger neighbour, *Crown Point Beach*, these studios and one- and three-bedroom apartments are huge (one sleeps eight) and come with fully equipped kitchen, living room, a/c, cable TV and phone – and immediate access to the sand and sea (as reflected in the price). ④

Kariwak Village Just off Store Bay Local Rd, Crown Point ⓣ639 8442, ⓦwww.kariwak.com. A jewel in the middle of this bustling area: yoga classes in the lush gardens, excellent personal service and peaceful atmosphere give a real feeling of holistic retreat. The thatch-roofed cabanas are split in two and furnished using local wood crafted on the premises; each has a/c and phone. There's also the option of larger and more luxurious garden rooms, and facilities include an ozonated pool, outdoor waterfall-fed jacuzzi, and a fabulous restaurant/bar (see p.218). ⑥

Mike's Store Bay Rd, Crown Point ⓣ639 8050. Excellent value and two minutes' walk from the airport, this busy, locally owned place has spacious, clean and inviting one-, two- and three-bedroom apartments with a/c, ceiling fan, cable TV and full kitchen. There's a mini-mart on site. ③

Rainbow Resort Milford Rd ⓣ639 9940, ⓦwww.rainbowresorttobago.com. An unimaginative


THE SOUTHWEST TIP
Wolf Rock
Booby Point
BUCCOO VILLAGE
Buccoo Reef & Nylon Pool
Buccoo Bay
No Man's Land
Bon Accord Lagoon
GOLDEN GROVE
Pigeon Point
PIGEON POINT RD
Milford Bay
BON ACCORD
MT PLEASANT BLVD
CANAAN
GUY STREET
CENTRE ST
MILFORD ROAD
GEORGE ST
ROBERT ST
DOUGLAS ST
ST CRY ST
TYSON HALL
KILGWYN BAY ROAD
KILGWYN BAY RD
STORE BAY BRANCH RD
SILK COTTON TRACE
GASKIN BAY ROAD
KILGWYN
FRIENDSHIP
See inset for detail
Store Bay
STORE BAY LOCAL ROAD
Crown Point International Airport
Sandy Point
Robinson Crusoe's Cave
CROWN POINT & AROUND
MILFORD ROAD
AIRPORT ROAD
JOHN GORMAN TRACE
Store Bay
Fort Milford
STORE BAY LOCAL ROAD
Police Station
Crown Point International Airport
Runway
Sandy Point
National Petroleum Garage
N P ROAD
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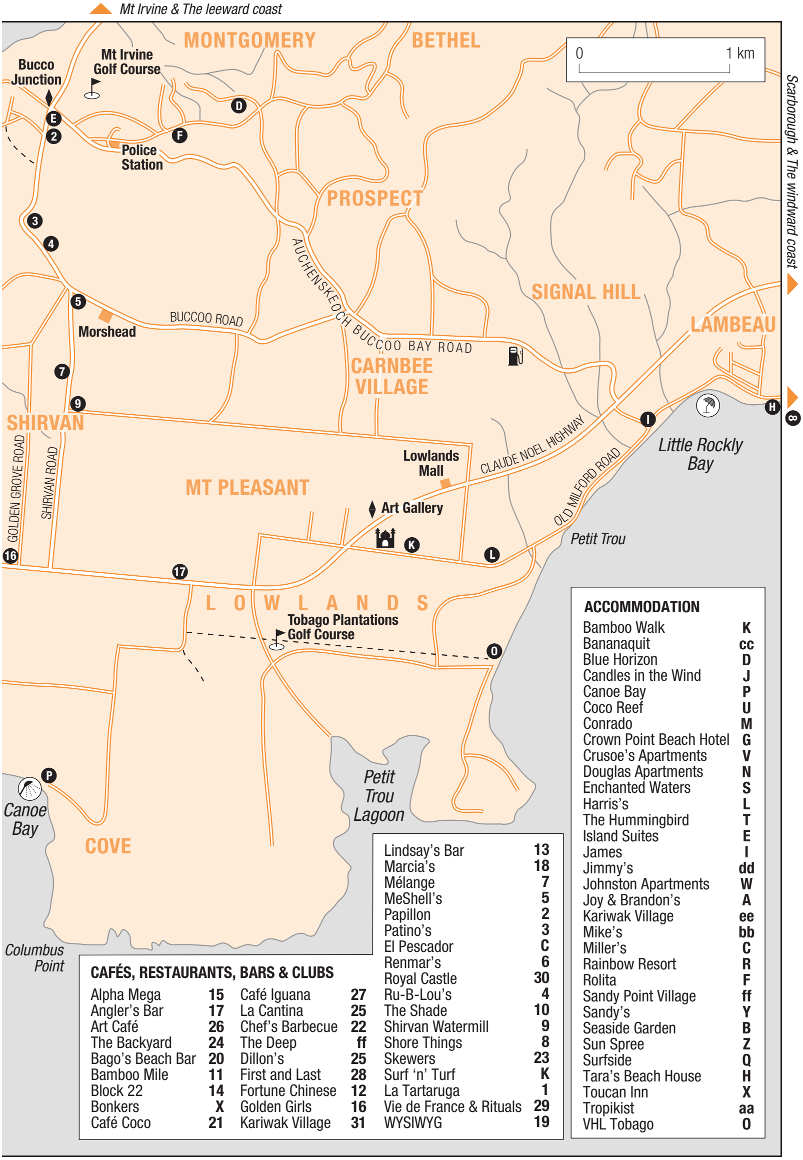
concrete exterior contains clean, functional white-tiled rooms with kitchenette (including microwave), en-suite bathroom, a/c and cable TV. A couple of rooms are adapted for disabled guests. Car rental is available, and there's a pool on site. Good central location a ten-minute walk to the beaches at Store Bay and Pigeon Point. ③

Sandy Point Village Sandy Point, Crown Point ☎ 639 8533, ⓦ www.sandypt.net. Large, clean studio apartments (some overlooking the sea) with fully equipped kitchen, en-suite bathroom, satellite TV, a/c and phone, tastefully furnished in wicker and teak and complemented by myriad facilities that include a mini-gym, two jacuzzis,


Mt Irvine & The leeward coast
Scarborough & The windward coast
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MONTGOMERY
BETHEL
Bucco Junction
Mt Irvine Golf Course
Police Station
PROSPECT
AUCHENSKEOCH
BUCCOO BAY ROAD
BUCCOO ROAD
Morshead
SIGNAL HILL
LAMBEAU
CARNBEE VILLAGE
SHIRVAN
GOLDEN GROVE ROAD
SHIRVAN ROAD
MT PLEASANT
Lowlands Mall
Art Gallery
CLAUDE NOEL HIGHWAY
OLD MILFORD ROAD
Little Rockly Bay
Petit Trou
LOWLANDS
Tobago Plantations Golf Course
Petit Trou Lagoon
Canoe Bay
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CAFÉS, RESTAURANTS, BARS & CLUBS

Alpha Mega	15
Angler's Bar	17
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Block 22	14
Bonkers	X
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Kariwak Village	31
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Marcia's	18
Mélange	7
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Papillon	2
Patino's	3
El Pescador	C
Renmar's	6
Royal Castle	30
Ru-B-Lou's	4
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Bananaquit	cc
Blue Horizon	D
Candles in the Wind	J
Canoe Bay	P
Coco Reef	U
Conrado	M
Crown Point Beach Hotel	G
Crusoe's Apartments	V
Douglas Apartments	N
Enchanted Waters	S
Harris's	L
The Hummingbird	T
Island Suites	E
James	I
Jimmy's	dd
Johnston Apartments	W
Joy & Brandon's	A
Kariwak Village	ee
Mike's	bb
Miller's	C
Rainbow Resort	R
Rolita	F
Sandy Point Village	ff
Sandy's	Y
Seaside Garden	B
Sun Spree	Z
Surfside	Q
Tara's Beach House	H
Toucan Inn	X
Tropikist	aa
VHL Tobago	O

two pools and car rental. The restaurant has stunning sea views. ③

Sandy's Guesthouse Store Bay Local Rd, next to *Toucan Inn*, Crown Point ☎639 9221. Seven simple and small but perfectly adequate rooms with en-suite bathroom, cable TV and a communal kitchen (more expensive ones have a/c), overseen by good-natured Tobagonian hosts. ②–③

Sun Spree Resort Store Bay Local Rd, Crown Point ☎631 5195, Ⓔsunspreeresort@gmail.com. Great little place spreading back from the road with a pool, restaurant and bar and spacious, modern rooms with a/c, cable TV, fridge and safe. Excellent

19 YORKE'S PRIDE

▲ Store Bay Beach, Crown Point

value, close to the beaches and restaurants but still nice and quiet, and very friendly staff. ③

Surfside Pigeon Point Rd, Crown Point ☎639 9702 daytime, ☎639 0614, ⓦwww.surfsidetobago.com. Centrally located at the junction of Pigeon Point and Airport roads, with truly Trinbagonian decor in roomy units with kitchenette, a/c, fan, cable TV and patio area. Vibrant and popular with Trinidadian holidaymakers. ③

Toucan Inn Store Bay Local Rd, Crown Point ☎639 7173, ⓦwww.toucan-inn.com. This welcoming hotel is a little removed from the area's bustle, but still within easy walking distance of the action. Decked out with wooden fittings, the garden rooms or cabanas around the pool all have a/c, tea- and coffee-making equipment and a porch area. *Bonkers* – the on-site restaurant – is a local institution (see p.218). ⑤

Tropikist Store Bay Rd, Crown Point ☎639 8512, ⓦwww.tropikist.com. Popular with Trinidadian visitors and a real holidaymaker kind of a place with volleyball nets, two pools, jacuzzi and a large grassy tanning area overlooking the beach. Rooms have a/c, phone, fridge and, on the second floor, lovely sea views. Two restaurants and a bar on site. ⑧

Store Bay Beach

A two-minute walk from the airport brings you to Crown Point's best place to swim, **Store Bay Beach** (lifeguards on duty 10am–6pm; free). Named after early Dutch settler Jan Stoer, this is some of the most popular sand in Tobago, and deservedly so; it's close to the main hotels, has tasty and inexpensive local food and is a great place to buy crafts from the many huts behind the beach. This is one of the liveliest spots on the island: Trini and overseas holidaymakers consume vast quantities of curry crab and dumplin' and keep the beach-chair operators busy, while glass-bottom boats drop anchor in the bay, music blaring as they load and offload groups of visitors.

Though fairly small and hemmed in by the *Coco Reef* hotel (see p.211) and the rocks, the beach is excellent: tides govern the extent of the fine, off-white sand, and lifeguards patrol the area flagged off for safe bathing. With a gentle shelf and crystal-clear water, a calm Store Bay is a good choice for adults and children – though be careful on rougher days, when waves get pretty big. Store Bay is the finishing point for the Great Race power-boat contest each August (see "Festival calendar", p.37), as well as a venue for open-air parties around Easter weekend, and the bars opposite are a popular liming spot, particularly during and after sunset.

Opposite the beach is a car park, shower/changing facilities (daily 10am–5.45pm; TT$1 per entry) with lockers for rent (TT$10 per day) as well as a couple of bars blasting reggae and soca, an ice-cream kiosk and the row of shacks housing the irresistible cookshops from which most people purchase their lunch (see box, p.218). If you don't fancy local staples, try the café at the Tobago Taxi Co-Op for generous portions of chicken or fish with fries, sandwiches and hot dogs.

Fort Milford and Sandy Point

Follow Store Bay Local Road west, past the small road that leads to Store Bay Beach, and you'll come to hotel-filled Sandy Point and the **Fort Milford** stockade. The ruins of gun-slitted coral stone were built by the British in 1777, and briefly appropriated by the French during their 1781–93 occupation of Tobago. Of the six cannons that remain, five are British and one French. Surrounded by well-kept gardens that make a quiet, shady chill-out spot, the fort gives a panoramic perspective over Store Bay beach and Milford Bay right up to Pigeon Point.

South of the fort, the road swings left before meeting the fences of the airport runway, encircled by narrow NP Road. Obscured by trees and shrubs, pretty and often deserted **Sandy Point Beach** is easy to miss; take the first dirt road off NP into the bush (just opposite the end of the tarmac) and you'll emerge onto a picturesque strip of fine white sand and translucent sea bordered by sea grapes and palms. Swimming is safe if you stick to the left of the beach; currents get strong around the headland to the right. Sandy Point is also a great spot from which to watch the **sunset**.

Pigeon Point

Some 200m north of the Store Bay turn-off, where Airport Road swings right to become Milford Road, the left-hand turn-off onto **Pigeon Point Road** takes you to the spot where the Atlantic Ocean meets the Caribbean Sea. The shoreline here – unlike the majority of Tobago's rugged beaches – is definitively Caribbean: powdery white sand with calm turquoise sea on one side and the ubiquitous swaying palms on the other. Lauded as the island's best beach, **Pigeon Point** (daily 8am–5.30pm; TT$18) has shady picnic gazebos, shower blocks, volleyball courts and children's apparatus, while the weathered wooden pier topped with a thatch-roofed hut must be Tobago's most photographed spot. The gentle shelf and tame currents make swimming benign, and there's ample space on the sand to stake out your niche without feeling cramped – though on a cruise ship day, it can get busy, so you might want to decamp to the palm grove between the ticket booth and the beach proper.

Watersports in southwest Tobago

The southwest is the best place to indulge in watersports, with a large variety of outlets and operators. **Jet-skis** have gained in popularity, and you can rent them from operators working the sands at Store Bay beach and Pigeon Point for around US$40 per half hour. Many also rent snorkel equipment for US$5–10 per day (though if you plan on **snorkelling** a lot, it's best to bring or buy your own). For **kite-surfing** (TT$150 per upwind drop-off or lessons TT$450/hr), **windsurfing** (TT$250/hr, lessons TT$400/hr) and **parasailing** (2 people TT$300 per flight), check Radical Watersports (ⓣ631 5150, ⓦwww.radicalsportstobago.com) on the Bon Accord side of Pigeon Point beach, which is also the best place for the above sports; plus they offer banana-boat rides, waterskiing and snorkelling tours of Buccoo reef. During the season (Oct–March), there's also excellent **surfing** at Mount Irvine Beach – early morning often sees twenty to thirty surfers riding the waves; for more information, see p.226.

Scuba diving

Tobago is one of the best **scuba diving** spots in the southeastern Caribbean, yet it has relatively few divers visiting its pristine coral reefs, volcanic formations and marine wrecks. The island is internationally recognized for its exciting, though difficult, **drift dives**, caused by the Guyana current, which results from the confluence of the Caribbean Sea and the Atlantic Ocean. The seas around Tobago are home to 300 species of South Atlantic coral and a variety of spectacular multicoloured fish, not to mention larger species such as stingrays, manta rays, sharks, dolphins, turtles and squid. Rarer species such as toadfish and shortnose batfish are also occasionally spotted. Adding a touch of history to underwater encounters are the sunken ships that litter the sea floor.

There are many dive shops in Crown Point, but Speyside (see p.254) is another popular diving centre, known as “the Disneyland of diving” and offering a variety of spectacular sites surrounding the offshore islands: Goat Island is popular for drift dives; St Giles for its rocky pinnacles and underwater canyon; and there’s a reasonable chance of seeing manta rays on dives around Little Tobago. Popular dive sites in the area include London Bridge, Bookends, Angel Reef, The Cathedral and Kelliston Drain – the site of the single largest brain coral in the Caribbean, and possibly the largest in the world. For more advanced divers, Sisters Rocks, offshore of Bloody Bay – with the sea shelf falling to 667m – is especially popular for larger species of fish including hammerhead sharks.

Tobago’s **diving industry** was only established in the 1980s but since then scuba diving operations have multiplied with many hotels, beaches and guesthouses sporting their own centres. Prices vary slightly between operators; in general one to three dives cost about US$40 each, one-day resort courses US$80, five-day PADI open water certification courses US450 and advanced open water from US$325. When deciding who to dive with it’s worth contacting the Association of Tobago Dive Operators (Ⓣ660 5445, Ⓦwww.tobagoscubadiving.com); they can provide a list of certified scuba diving operators (also available on their website). Safety comes first. Always check for the prominent display of a dive affiliation, such as NAUI, PADI, SSI or BSAC. A good operator will always ask you to fill in paperwork and present a diving certification card. The rental equipment should be well rinsed; if you see sand or salt crystals this may indicate careless equipment care. Inspect all equipment thoroughly, check hoses for wear, see that mouthpieces are secure and ensure they give you a depth gauge and air-pressure gauge. Listen for air leaks when you gear up and smell the air, which should be odourless. If you smell oil or anything else, search for a different operator. In case of accidents, Tobago has a recompression chamber in Roxborough (Ⓣ660 4000).

Scuba operators

Aquamarine Dive *Blue Waters Inn*, Speyside Ⓣ639 4416, Ⓦwww.aquamarinedive.com.

Extra Divers Pigeon Point Ⓣ639 7274; and *Speyside Inn*, Speyside Ⓣ639 7424, Ⓦwww.extradiverstobago.eu.

Manta Dive Centre Pigeon Point Road Ⓣ639 9969 or 678 3979, Ⓦwww.mantadive.com.

R & Sea Diving Company *Toucan Inn*, Store Bay Local Rd, Bon Accord Ⓣ639 8120, Ⓦwww.rseadivers.com.

Scuba Adventure Safari *Turtle Beach Hotel*, Turtle Beach and Pigeon Point Rd Ⓣ660 7333 or 7767, Ⓦwww.divetobago.com.

Tobago Dive Experience *Manta Lodge*, Speyside Ⓣ639 4888, Ⓦwww.tobagodiveexperience.com.

Undersea Tobago *Coco Reef*, Crown Point Ⓣ631 2626, Ⓦwww.underseatobago.com.

Wild Turtle Dive Pigeon Point Ⓣ639 7936, Ⓦwww.wildturtledive.com.

East around the headland, the wind whips over the Bon Accord Lagoon, providing a welcome respite from the steamy heat of the beach as well as ideal conditions for kite-boarding and windsurfing – there's an outlet offering lessons and equipment rental (see p.215). Close to the entrance, shops sell beachwear, clothes and souvenirs, while the two **bars** at each end of the beach are popular liming spots at sundown; like Sandy Point, the sunset views here are magnificent. A handful of **food outlets** sell inexpensive roti and other snacks, and a branch of *Rituals/Pizza Boys* dishes out iced coffees and pepperoni slices. If you want something more substantial, there's a restaurant at the Bon Accord end of the beach selling Creole lunches.

Picturesque as it is, Pigeon Point is not without **controversy**. It was the first beach to charge an entry fee, much to the consternation of locals and the fishermen whose right to walk and fish freely from the beach has been curtailed. Equally, many bemoan the water quality, thanks to runoff from the area's many hotels, and lack of water circulation following constriction of groynes – certainly it's far from crystal clear.

Bon Accord

Following the right-hand curve of Airport Road/Milford Road takes you into the **BON ACCORD** district, a mostly residential area whose main point of interest is the **Bon Accord Lagoon**, a sweeping oval of mangrove swamp and reef-sheltered, shallow water which forms one of the most important fish nurseries on the island. Though the marine life has been adversely affected by runoff from a nearby sewage treatment plant, the lagoon's sea-grass beds remain a sanctuary for conch, snails, shrimp, oysters, crab, urchins and sponges.

Most of the land skirting the swamp is **privately owned**. You can get pretty close by turning down Golden Grove Road, the turn-off for which lies a couple of kilometres east along Milford Road, and taking the first dirt track you come to – passing the crumbling remains of a windmill and cocoa drying house, once part of the Bon Accord sugar estate (note that the road becomes extremely bumpy after the small bridge, and is best attempted with 4WD in the wet season). A better way to see the lagoon is on a Buccoo Reef boat tour (see p.209) that includes a barbecue at a deserted sandy spit on the lagoon's north side known as **No Man's Land**, an idyllic place to swim.

Eating, drinking and nightlife

Crown Point has **eating** options for all tastes and budgets, mostly within easy walking distance of the area's hotels and guesthouses. For inexpensive barbecue, look for stalls set up by the roadside at lunchtime and on weekend evenings; close to *Mike's* resort on Store Bay Road, there's also a van selling rotis and a cream-painted little wooden building dishing up good local lunches. The *Royal Castle* outlet at the airport is also good for quick fried chicken and surprisingly tasty fish and chips, while the cheerful and busy *Tristar* restaurant opposite the departures area is a good bet for local meals while you wait for your flight; there's a bar here, too.

Crown Point is the centre of Tobago's **nightlife** scene, with legions of rum shops and more tourist-oriented **bars**, as well as the island's only nightclubs. Most restaurants are also a great for an apéritif or post-dinner drink.

Eating

The Backyard Airport Rd, Crown Point ☎639 7264. Affordable and easy-going café by day, serving excellent baguette sandwiches as well as salads, home-made cakes, fresh juices and good coffee. In the evenings (Tues–Fri only), the reasonably priced dinner options run from smoked fish salad to swordfish in a beetroot red-wine sauce or coconut chicken.

Bamboo Mile Milford Rd, Bon Accord ☎631 8484. A laidback yet sophisticated atmosphere reigns at

Store Bay dining

An essential part of any visit to Tobago is a plate of **crab and dumplin'**, **macaroni pie with callaloo**, or fresh fish with provisions from one of the row of takeaways facing Store Bay Beach. This strip of eateries (from right to left there's *Miss Jean's*, *Miss Trim's*, *Miss Joycie's*, *Alma's*, *Sylvia's* and *Miss Esmie's*) offer tasty, inexpensive local cuisine, and the covered sea-facing gazebo with seating and tables is an attractive place to sit, eat and watch the world go by. Prices and food vary little from stall to stall: bake with fish or eggs, buljol and smoked herring for breakfast; while for lunch, there's goat, beef, chicken or vegetable roti, stewed beef or chicken, conch or crab and dumplin', pelau, vegetable rice, stewed lentils, macaroni pie, callaloo and ground provisions. Most stalls also make juices such as mauby or grapefruit, and perhaps peanut or sea-moss punch. All are open daily from around 8.30am to 8.30pm, but the flow of custom usually dictates business hours.

this moderately priced restaurant with tasty fusion-style seafood (try the crab-stuffed barracuda fillet on mashed yam) and an attractive open-air deck. Also a good place for a relaxing pre- or post-dinner drink, with excellent cocktails. Closed Tues.

Bonkers *Toucan Inn*, Store Bay Local Rd, Bon Accord ☎639 7173. This excellent and popular restaurant serves tasty, mid-priced Tobagonian food under a shady pavilion or at poolside tables. Breakfast is local- or European-style, while lunch usually includes sandwiches and soup. Dinner highlights include "voodoo" shrimp, "lambaabaa" curry and steak tenderloin. There's a good and varied wine list and regular live music in high season.

Café Coco Just off Pigeon Point Rd, Crown Point ☎639 0996. Ornate gardens decorated with waterfalls, fountains and ponds provide attractive surroundings, although the mid-priced food – which draws on influences from around the Caribbean and includes dishes such as peppered fish salad or curried lamb with aubergine choka – is rather hit and miss.

Café Iguana Store Bay Local Rd, near the police station, Bon Accord ☎631 8205. This lively bar and restaurant serves breakfast (local and international), plus good, fairly expensive Caribbean cuisine for lunch and dinner, from crab backs and jerk port to fish in a tamarind sauce or Creole chicken. Long cocktail list, and live entertainment (Thurs–Sun), from jazz on Thursdays to Sunday's Latin night.

Chef's Barbecue Airport Rd, Crown Point. This is a great option for a cheap takeaway (though there are a couple of tables out front), selling barbecued chicken and pigtail or grilled fish, plus local staples such as pigeon peas, macaroni pie, callaloo and salads. Saltfish and bake breakfasts are also good.

Dillon's Airport Rd, Crown Point ☎639 8765. Busy, reasonably priced seafood restaurant, with an a/c dining room and outdoor tables. Sumptuous, carefully prepared Creole dinners include catch of the day with coconut chutney and paw paw salsa or shrimp and lobster pasta; the seafood ceviche starter is also good.

Fortune Chinese Restaurant Milford Rd, Bon Accord ☎639 8818. Plush Chinese restaurant with an excellent range of well-priced dishes, as well as a good vegetarian selection, to eat in or take away.

Kariwak Village Store Bay Local Rd, Bon Accord ☎639 8442. Fresh herbs and spices, inventive slants on local staples and a relaxing setting make this restaurant, attached to the hotel of the same name (see p.211), one of best and most expensive places to eat in the Crown Point area. Breakfast and dinner menus are set – usually with a meat, fish or vegetarian option – and everything is supremely fresh, succulently cooked and completely delicious. Accompanied by live music, the Friday-night buffet is particularly good. Great service and vegan food available.

La Cantina RBTT compound, Airport Rd ☎639 8242. Bustling little place serving truly excellent, authentically Italian pizzas baked in a wood-fired oven. The forty different toppings range from Capricciosa (tomato, mozzarella, prosciutto, mushroom, artichokes and anchovies) to Greca (mozzarella, feta, tomato), and there are also good salads and specials, plus excellent cocktails and wines (including prosecco). No bookings so you may have to wait for a table, but takeaway available.

Marcia's Store Bay Local Rd, Bon Accord ☎639 0359. The genial owners make this one of the most welcoming small restaurants in the area, offering great, affordable local food: anything from red snapper Creole, lobster in coconut garlic sauce, stewed or curried conch and Sunday-style stewed chicken with macaroni pie and callaloo, all served with rice and ground provisions. Gorgeous cassava pudding for dessert.

Skewers Airport Rd. Middle Eastern place with a couple of tables, serving mostly takeaway orders of grilled chicken or fish, gyros plus good tabouleh, baba ganoush, fatoush and hummus.

Vie de France Bakery & Rituals Coffee House Opposite the airport, Crown Point. With its pretty green and yellow terrace filled with lots of plants, this is the ideal place to wait for your flight while munching on good and affordable pasta, sandwiches, burgers and cakes, or sipping tea and coffee.

WYSIWYG Pigeon Point Rd ☎631 8867. Swathed with fishing nets and seafaring paraphernalia, this is a good spot for a drink, with an open-air terrace out front. The food ranges from rotisserie chicken and schnitzels to pastas and curry shrimp, but the seafood is somewhat overpriced.

Drinking and nightlife

Angler's Bar Store Bay. Facing the sea at Store Bay, this is a good spot to sink a few beers as the sun sets, accompanied by blasting dancehall and soca.

Bago's Beach Bar Pigeon Point Rd, Crown Point. Popular beach bar in a quiet spot next to a pretty stretch of sand on the way to Pigeon Point. The drinks and simple meals (roti and the like) may be overpriced, but there's no better place to get drunk while watching the sun set than here. Happy hour 5.30–7pm.

The Deep *Sandy Point Village* hotel, Crown Point. Subterranean, air-conditioned (non-smoking) disco popular with upwardly mobile locals and tourists – good for a hassle-free dance. Moderate cover charge, and women usually get in for free.

First and Last Store Bay Local Rd. Just off Airport Rd, this classic Tobago rum shop puts out the speakers on weekend evenings to pump gentle reggae into the streets – and the beers are truly "beastly" cold.

Lindsay's Bar Milford Rd, Bon Accord. A ten-minute walk from Crown Point, this unpretentious rum shop is patronized mainly by locals and is a good choice for those wishing to shake off the tourists and catch up with local gossip.

Renmar's Pigeon Point. Right on the famed sands of Pigeon Point – the drinks are a little overpriced but the sunsets are magical and the setting lovely.

The Shade Mt Pleasant Blvd, just off Milford Rd, Bon Accord ☎639 9651. Tobago's biggest and best nightclub, with a dance-floor under a large, open-air thatched cabana a few minutes' walk from Crown Point. Invariably packed with both locals and tourists, but only from around midnight onwards. Cover charge Fri & Sat. Closed Sun–Tues.

Milford Road, Canaan and Canoe Bay

Bisecting Tobago's low-lying southwest tip, ruler-straight **Milford Road** is western Tobago's main artery. Trucks, cars and route taxis fly past a roadside lined with shops, fruit stalls and houses, and the whole stretch is the busiest you'll find away from Scarborough. This area was once carved up into individual sugar plantations, and away from the main road there are still large tracts of undeveloped land where cattle graze or coconut trees sway heavy with nuts. These days, though, Milford Road is a place to stock up on provisions, with the island's largest supermarket, Penny Savers, on Milford Road in **CANAAN** (which was given its rather odd name by Moravian missionaries); there are also plenty of small-scale rum shops in which to sink a few beers.

The commercial activity tails off towards Shirvan Road, the route to Buccoo (see p.223); just beyond here, a turn-off to the right is signposted for **Canoe Bay Resort**, a pretty and quiet **beach** (daily 9am–5pm; TT$15, includes use of showers and bathroom) that was once the site of a large Amerindian settlement; the English named it Canoe Bay after the Indian pirogues moored here. Today, the fifteen acres around the bay are beautifully landscaped and an appealingly peaceful place to spend the day (or even overnight; the hotel here is reviewed on p.220). The main area boasts lawns, thatched gazebos, picnic tables and a secluded beach of clean yellow sand and calm waters – the view stretches right down to Crown Point and there's some fine snorkelling to be had. The facilities are good and there's a small bar serving drinks, food and ice cream all day. This is an excellent place to come if you're travelling with children, since the sheltered water makes for safe swimming and the large grassy areas are perfect for ball games.

Practicalities

There are quite a few **places to stay** in the Canaan area, though unless you have a car, you're probably better off in Crown Point. Nonetheless, *Harris's Guesthouse* (Ⓣ639 0513, Ⓦwww.harris-jungle-tours.com; ③), on Golden Grove Road, is an excellent base, run by one of Tobago's best tour guides and with three spotless en-suite rooms with private patios and air conditioning; family rooms are also available. Breakfast is included, as are airport pick-ups. Right on the beach and in spacious grounds, beautifully secluded 🏃 *Canoe Bay*, Cove Estate (Ⓣ631 0367, Ⓦwww.canoett.com) has lovely apartments with air conditioning, TV, balcony and kitchen; there's also a bar and a heart-shaped pool, and it's an ideal spot for families.

As for **eating**, Canaan has one or two inexpensive takeaway roti shops such as *Alpha Mega*, at the intersection with St Cyr Street, which also does fish and chips and has a pool table and a few tables for eating in. Other tasty snacks like smoked herring and hops are available at *Golden Girls Bakery*, between St Cyr Street and Golden Grove Road, while the 🏃 *Art Café*, on Milford Road opposite the Canoe Bay turn-off, is an oasis of calm offering great burgers, falafel, salads and smoothies, plus delicious home-made cakes, from baked cheesecake to apple pie. *Block 22*, on the corner of Douglas Street in Canaan, is one of the island's most characterful **bars**.

Lowlands, Little Rockly Bay and around

About 1km east of Canaan on Milford Road, the tarmac widens as you approach Claude Noel Highway (named after the local boxer who was a world lightweight champion in the early 1980s), and built several years later as a swifter route into Scarborough than the narrow Milford Road, which swings off right from the highway just after the Tobago Plantations turn-off. At the point where Milford Road meets Claude Noel Highway, the once-swampy peninsula known as **Lowlands** is now home to **Tobago Plantations**, a development of villas, condos and a 9- and 18-hole golf course (US$100 for 18 holes, club rental available; Ⓣ631 0875). Overhanging the ocean behind the course and bearing the full brunt of the Atlantic winds that blast the coastline here, the sprawling complex of plantation-style buildings was originally opened as the *Tobago Hilton*; poor bookings and heavy maintenance costs led to the Hilton group pulling out in 2008. The property was subsequently purchased by the government and renamed *VHL Tobago*, but at the time of writing remained closed.

Past the golf course, the concrete conglomeration of the **Lowlands Mall** spreads back from the road to the left. Easily the largest in Tobago, it has a food court and a **cinema**, MovieTowne (Ⓣ631 1843, Ⓦmovietowne.com) alongside the parade of stores, from book stores and pharmacies to Mystic Hemp, selling clothing and T-shirts made from the eponymous fibre. Beyond the mall, the road begins to climb; once you've passed the Auchenskeoch Buccoo Bay Road (a convenient shortcut to Buccoo and Mount Irvine), you come to a set of traffic lights marking a crossroads. A left turn here takes you to Signal Hill (see below), while a right leads to the hilly residential community of **LAMBEAU**, a tight-knit and completely untouristy village.

Old Milford Road

Just before Tobago Plantations, the signposted **Old Milford Road** cuts off the highway to the right, swinging past Tobago's only **mosque** and winding a scenic route along the coast towards Scarborough, with lovely views of the wind-whipped Atlantic peeking between the palms and houses. The road first hits the sea at **Petit Trou**, a gorgeous swathe of wind-blasted sand that's popular with kiteboarders and windsurfers. Locals often park up in the lot adjacent to the beach to eat lunch or just enjoy the breeze, but swimming is not recommended due to strong undercurrents and the absence of lifeguards.

There's an "official" beach facility a little further north along the coast at **Little Rockly Bay**, which was used as a site for horse racing before the construction of Shirvan racetrack. Lifeguards are on duty here daily 10am to 6pm, but it's not an especially appealing place to take a dip. Beyond Lambeau, Little Rockly Bay becomes **Rockly Bay**, but the ruggedness of the coastline, undercurrents and proximity to Scarborough (which ensures the murky water is seasoned with sewage), means it's not a place to swim. Just before the capital, the tarmac runs out abruptly; to get back onto the highway, take the left by the abattoir.

Along the highway

Back on the Claude Noel Highway, a left-hand turn at the crossroads leading to Lambeau will take you up the steep route to **SIGNAL HILL**, networked by residential streets that afford the odd sweeping view down to Scarborough. Throughout Tobago's chequered history, Signal Hill has been used as a lookout point, notably by signalmen communicating out to sea and to nearby forts. Today, the area is temporary home to Tobago's **library**, as well as a base for the Trinidad and Tobago Regiment; listen out for strains of their marching band at practice.

The next right-hand turn-off from the highway, about 1.5km further, is the route to **Shaw Park Cultural Centre**, a building site at the time of writing but due to reopen in 2010 and used to host festivals, events and sporting meets. Overlooking the grounds, on the other side of the highway, is a striking yellow pipe sculpture known as "**the matchstick man**". A cryptic monument designed as part of Tobago's millennium celebrations, it stands as an ironic reminder of what happened: the island spent more than TT$40 million on the sculpture and a large concert, only to have a dismally low turnout.

Another kilometre down the highway is the next set of traffic lights, where a left-hand turn brings you to quiescent **Orange Hill Road**, a rambling route to Mount Irvine on the leeward coast. Past the attractive Spring Garden Moravian church, the road splits: left takes you into **Patience Hill**, a quiet rural community that makes a pleasant drive and is a great way to get completely lost along the winding country roads; if you can find it, there's a fantastic view of Lowlands from the top of what locals call "Patience Hill Back Bottom Road". The right fork will bring you into sparsely populated but pretty **Orange Hill** itself, its bougainvillea hedges and overgrown empty lots sliding loosely into the town of Bethel and down to the leeward coast.

Practicalities

Though several of the **hotels** along Old Milford Road have closed, either indefinitely or for refurbishment, there are a couple of good options remaining. Quirky *Tara's Beach House*, Little Rockly Bay (Ⓣ639 1556, Ⓦwww.tarasbeachhouse.com; ③), is right on the water, with an eclectic collection of rooms, a pool and hammocks strewn around the grounds. Back toward the turn-off from the highway, efficiently run family-friendly *Bamboo Walk* (Ⓣ631 0286, Ⓦwww.bamboo-walk.com; ③) has spacious, handsomely styled rooms decked out in oranges and greens, with air conditioning, cable TV and a private patio. There's wi-fi throughout the property and an excellent **restaurant**, *Surf 'n' Turf*, serving good coffee and breakfasts, plus buffalo mozzarella salad, rack of lamb or more local dishes for lunch and dinner. The Friday karaoke night and BBQ also draws quite a crowd.

Another great place to stop off along Old Milford Road is *Shore Things*, Lambeau, a delightful, well-priced **café** and craft store in a brightly painted old house with a veranda overlooking the sea. Delicious light lunches, pizzas, pastelles, quiches and salads are on offer alongside fresh pastries and fruit juices. The places listed here are included on the map on pp.212–213.

Along Shirvan Road

Just before Milford Road widens into the highway, the left-hand turn-off of **Shirvan Road** is the route to **Buccoo Bay** and its famous **reef**, the golf course and surfing beach at Mount Irvine and, ultimately, Grafton and Turtle beaches and the neat town of Plymouth. The first stretch is bordered to the left by a plantation of towering coconut palms and to the right by thick hedges masking what was once Shirvan Park **horse racing track**. A fire in 1985 put a permanent stop to horse racing in Tobago and today part of the site has been slated for development.

Continuing north, Shirvan Road passes turn-offs to quietly residential **Mount Pleasant** and **Carnbee** (the latter has a couple of supermarkets; see p.206), while several smart restaurants line the road. A cluster of tourist-oriented signposts mark the next crossroads, **Buccoo Junction**. Here, route taxis running between Scarborough and the north coast pick up and drop off passengers, so you'll often see beckoning hands if you're driving. The right turn at the crossroads is Auchenskeoch (pronounced "or-kins-styor") Buccoo Bay Road – take the first left from this road and you'll climb into the residential portion of Mount Irvine, with its lavish villas and fantastic views down over Buccoo Reef.

Sunday School

A Tobago institution, **Sunday School** is most definitely not for the pious. A massive beach party that the whole island seems to attend, Sunday School is the highlight of the week's nightlife, completely taking over Buccoo village with swarms of people, food stalls and cars squeezed sardine-style into available spaces – though whether the construction of the new tourism facility here will see the end of Sunday School's fetchingly seedy side remains to be seen; certainly the whole experience promises to be a much slicker affair in the future.

The action begins at around 8–9pm, when the **Buccooneers Steel Orchestra** plays pan for a couple of hours while the crowds sample food or browse the craft stalls. The crowd begins to thicken around 10–11pm, when the **sound system** starts up; music policy is inevitably Jamaican dancehall with the most popular soca, hip-hop and R&B tunes thrown in, and the dancefloor is invariably jumping as experienced winers (see "Glossary," p.303) display their skills, foreigners let loose or take a wining lesson, and the gigolos (and tourists) scout for a partner – Sunday School is well known as a kind of pick-up joint, so it's the ideal place to watch the intricate mating dance of thrill-seeking foreigners and hard-working beach bums. For a more sedate atmosphere, head for *Hendrix Bar*, opposite the spanking new facility where the main event is held. Sunday School is not just for the young – locals and tourists of all ages come here to chill out and many tour guides offer Sunday School trips for about US$20. Note that parking can be difficult as the night wears on, so try to arrive early.

It hardly needs saying that Sunday School is a place where you should be more mindful than usual of the risk of **theft**. Leave valuables and other items you can't afford to lose at the hotel, avoid getting so drunk that you become a sitting duck for opportunistic robbers and, if driving, try to park in busy, well-lit places, since muggings have been known to take place as revellers return to their cars at the end of the evening.

Goat races

Easter weekend is to Tobago what Carnival is to Trinidad: an unofficial national holiday when hotels are filled to the brim and the island erupts with festivities. A succession of huge open-air parties and well-attended harvest feasts culminate on Easter Tuesday at the **Buccoo goat races**, a tradition since 1925. Though attempting to race one of the world's most belligerent animals may seem a little ridiculous to the uninitiated, these tournaments are taken very seriously by aficionados, who study the form (and character) of the sleekly groomed animals and place bets on their favourites. Raised separately from the run-of-the-mill roadside grazer, racing goats undergo a rigorous training routine and return to the tracks year after year. Prize specimens live out their days as stud goats to breed more potential champions.

The preliminary round at the Mount Pleasant Family Fun Day on Easter Monday gives everyone a chance to see which goat is running best, but the main event is at Buccoo on the Tuesday. Food vendors and craft stalls line the streets and a carnival atmosphere builds as fast as the crowds, who are kept entertained by dancing and drumming in between stakes. Smartly attired in white shorts and coloured vests, the jockeys limber up by the side of the tracks, a necessary exercise, as their ability to keep up with their goat (and keep hold of it) has more influence on their success or failure than the capabilities of the goat itself: animals are raced at the end of a rope, and "encouraged" by way of a long stick. The actual races are a joy to watch once the jockeys manage to manoeuvre their malignant charges into starting position. With wild-eyed stares, the goats tear haphazardly down the track, often taking a diagonal course that trips up competitors and runners alike, to the delight of the spectators. The best of the bunch battle for supremacy in the final "Champ of Champs" race, while "Champion Jockey", "Champion Trainer" and "Most Outstanding Goat" prizes are also presented.

Once all the races are over on Tuesday, the final all-night party swings into action, and the dancing continues until dawn.

A little further up the road and you're at the outskirts of tiny **Bethel**, a precipitously situated and completely charming rural village that affords more wonderful views of Lowlands and the Buccoo coast. From Bethel, Orange Hill Road eventually meets Claude Noel Highway a couple of kilometres west of Scarborough.

Buccoo

The left turn at Buccoo Junction takes you past a small supermarket and into the small settlement of **BUCCOO**, haphazardly built around the calm and beautiful bay that shares its name. Fishing remains a major industry here – the day's catch is sold next to the beach when the boats return in the late afternoon – but ever since the nearby reef became a premier attraction, this close-knit community has become more dependent on tourism, best known for the weekly **Sunday School** shenanigans and for the annual Easter **goat races**. Buccoo's enduringly shabby outlook has not gone unnoticed by tourism bigwigs, however, and at the time of writing a new TT$100 million visitor centre and Sunday School space was under construction right on the bayfront.

The **beachfront** immediately in front of Buccoo is primarily the preserve of fishermen and not really a place to swim, but the undeveloped, palm-lined western fringe of the bay is gorgeous, with clean water and plenty of shells and coral fragments to collect. Trees and mangroves separate the beach from the Bon Accord Wetland, and if you walk right to the end of the sands and clamber into the bush, you can explore the remains of the house that Britain's Princess Margaret stayed in during a Tobago sojourn in the late 1950s. Note that many of the coastal trees here are toxic manchineels (see p.51); offenders have a white strip painted around the trunk.

Buccoo Reef and Nylon Pool

Covering around 12 square kilometres of Caribbean seabed between Pigeon Point and Buccoo Bay, **Buccoo Reef** is Tobago's largest and most heavily visited collection of corals, from hard stag and elkhorn varieties to waving purple sea fans and peach-coloured fire coral, all of which make good feeding for the brilliantly coloured trigger, butterfly, surgeon and parrot fish which thrive here. To the south of the reef is **Nylon Pool**, a gleaming coralline sandbar forming an appealing metre-deep swimming pool smack in the middle of the sea. It's said to have been named by Princess Margaret during her stay in the 1950s; she supposedly remarked that the water was as clear as her nylon stockings – nylon had just been invented.

Sadly, however, human interference has taken a devastating toll. Carelessly placed anchors and thoughtless removal of coral souvenirs – not to mention the inevitable pollution – mean that many parts bear more resemblance to a coral graveyard than a living reef. Large sections have died off completely, leaving white skeletons in their wake, while overfishing has reduced the fish and crustacean populations, and poorly aimed spear guns have ripped chunks from the coral. The situation became so bad that Buccoo was declared a protected national park in 1973, but with scant resources to enforce the law the legal status meant little and the damage continued practically unabated. Today, glass-bottom boat operators are more conscientious, anchoring only on parts of the dead reef and warning visitors that touching or removing reef matter and shells is illegal, but they still hand out plastic shoes, making it possible for a single footstep to damage or kill hundreds of years' growth. You can do your bit by standing on the seabed only and refusing to buy any coral trinkets.

If you want to see the reef, you'll have no difficulty in finding a **glass-bottom boat** to take you; most leave from Store Bay (see p.209) and, to a lesser degree, Buccoo and Pigeon Point. Two- to three-hour trips cost around US$25, and usually leave at about 11am and 2pm.

Practicalities

Buccoo holds a few inexpensive places to **stay**, as well as a couple of good **restaurants**, while Shirvan Road has a few more upmarket options, and there a couple of alternatives on Old Grange Road, above the golf course. There are also several inexpensive cookshops selling local food on Buccoo's main road.

If you're self-catering, note there are a couple of supermarkets in the area (see p.206).

Hotels and guesthouses

Blue Horizon Jacamar Drive ⓣ639 0433. Commanding great views over the golf course and the sea from a hilly setting (you'll need a car), these spacious rooms with a/c, cable TV, living room, patio and full kitchen are a great bargain. There's a pool, constant cool breezes, friendly staff and a great feeling of seclusion. ③

Enchanted Waters 198–202 Shirvan Rd ⓣ639 9481, ⓦwww.enchantedwaterstobago.com. Adjacent to *Patino's* restaurant (see opposite), this hotel's luxurious rooms have a/c, cable TV, phone, radio, en-suite bathroom and an open-air kitchenette on the balcony. The beautiful honeymoon suites include a four-poster bed and jacuzzi. Landscaped grounds feature a pool and a waterfall. ④

Island Suites Buccoo Junction ⓣ639 0797, ⓦwwwtobagosuites.com. New orange-painted complex behind the Sunset Palm casino, offering comfortable a/c rooms with cable TV, ironing boards and tea-making facilities; there's a nice pool and a grill restaurant on site. ③

Joy & Brandon's Guesthouse 26 Buccoo Point, Buccoo ⓣ309 0062, ⓔbrandonbrucebuccoo@gmail.com. Locally run place set back from the main drag, with hospitable owners and clean, basic a/c rooms, a communal kitchen and TV area. ②

Miller's Guesthouse Miller St, Buccoo Village ⓣ660 8371 or 772 5609, ⓦwww.millersguesthouse.com. Pleasant guesthouse in a nice spot overlooking Buccoo Bay. The rooms (sleeping two or three) are basic yet comfortable, with private bathroom, sink and fan; a/c costs a little more. Dorm beds (US$17) are available for budget travellers, while a self-contained beach house sleeping nine is good value for groups. ③

Rolita 29 Old Grange Rd ☎639 1910, 765 7970. Great budget option in the hills above Buccoo, with a pool and simple rooms with mosquito nets, fan and cable TV. Communal kitchen, laundry facilities and meals available. ①

Seaside Garden 29 Village ☎639 0682, ⓦwww.tobago-guesthouse.com. Clean, simple rooms with mosquito nets, ceiling fans and en-suite bathrooms, all within staggering distance of the Sunday School action. The upstairs apartment with living area and fully equipped kitchen has sea views. Bike rental available. ②–③

Restaurants and bars

El Pescador Buccoo Point ☎631 1266. On a terrace overlooking the sea and reachable via Miller St or by walking along the seafront, the setting here is great, with sea breezes and a perfect sunset view best enjoyed with a rum punch in hand. The mid-priced seafood menu includes shrimp salad and calamari at lunchtime, and nicely cooked fish, lobster and seafood for dinner, alongside steaks and lamb chops.

La Tartaruga Buccoo Village ☎639 0940. Owned and run by a mercurial Italian émigré, with tables indoors or on an open-air patio. It features top-class Italian cuisine: lovely starters include fish carpaccio, parmesan eggplant or antipasti; there's also a range of home-made pasta (gnocchi in gorgonzola sauce, sage ravioli, beef and mushroom cannelloni) or specialities such as grilled lobster, shrimp and fish. Desserts – Drambuie crème caramel, home-made Italian ice cream – are equally memorable. The food is reasonably priced given the quality, but the extensive wine selection can increase your bill considerably. Closed Sun.

Mélange 133 Shirvan Rd ☎631 0121. Quirky mid-priced Creole restaurant housed in a pretty multi coloured colonial-style building, with tables in the fairy-light strewn garden too. Starter highlights are prawn risotto with eggplant choka or lobster, fish and goat's cheese crepe, while the main courses include imported steak with peppercorn and port sauce or crab cakes with salad and pesto.

MeShell's Shirvan Rd ☎631 0353. Peach-painted restaurant serving expensive Caribbean cuisine with an international twist. Good for seafood, especially shrimp and lobster, and kids' meals available, too.

Papillon Buccoo ☎631 1353. Standard Chinese restaurant, featuring several inexpensive duck, chicken, pork, beef and shrimp dishes, along with one or two more original options such as squid. Takeaway and eat in.

Patino's 198–202 Shirvan Rd ☎639 9481. Friendly Trinidadian/Canadian hosts serve pricey but supremely fresh and tasty Thai dishes, seafood and pasta in a congenial setting; the daily specials advertised on the huge board outside (shrimp night, lobster night etc) are good value.

Ru-B-Lou's 196 Shirvan Rd ☎639 8046. Genial place offering mid-priced dinners featuring fresh and tasty meat and fish dishes prepared in both local and international styles – the baby back ribs are especially popular. The on-site bar, *Shakers*, is a good bet for a drink, with live entertainment in high season.

Shirvan Watermill Shirvan Rd ☎639 0000. Moderately expensive restaurant with tables beautifully set under the cut-stone roof of an abandoned mill. Beautifully cooked seafood dominates the menu, from lobster, shrimp and fish crepes to crab-stuffed snapper, plus water buffalo steak with bearnaise sauce or duck in a rum and honey sauce.

Mount Irvine

The swaying palms and shaven greens of Tobago's first **golf course** herald the outskirts of **MOUNT IRVINE**, the next coastal village north from Buccoo. Straddled across Shirvan Road, the course was opened in 1968 as the main attraction of *Mount Irvine* hotel (see p.226), which still owns and maintains the greens. This professional standard, 72-par, 18-hole course with several onerous water holes and some wicked undulations, offers a challenging game and plays host to the Tobago Pro-Am tournament every January. Green fees are US$30 for nine holes, US$48 for eighteen; club rental is available.

Heading north past the golf course, the hitherto hidden Caribbean sea coast swings spectacularly back into view; yachts bob on the waves and craggy volcanic rock formations bordering Booby Point make an arresting backdrop to the west.

There's a lovely section of undeveloped beach known as **Grange** or Mount Irvine Wall behind a low concrete bulwark just past the golf course; it's very popular with locals who often sit chatting in the emerald-green water.

Around the next bend is **Mount Irvine Bay Beach**, a busy slip of fine yellow sand surrounded by covered gazebos for picnicking and the ubiquitous palms and sea grape trees. The showers and changing facilities (daylight hours; TT$1) are adequate, and there's a bar/restaurant doling out mountains of fried shark 'n' bake. During the summer months, the water here is calm enough to make exploration of the ornate offshore **reef** a joy, and the clear, greenish waters offer excellent swimming year-round. However, Mount Irvine is at its liveliest between December and March, when it becomes one of the island's best **surfing** beaches, with huge breakers crashing in and a very surf-dude scene on the sand, a world away from the packaged postcard-Caribbean feel of Pigeon Point. Boards can usually be rented for around TT$100 per hour at the beach; ask around, or check Trinidad & Tobago Surf Experience at nearby Pleasant Prospect (Ⓣ355 5691, Ⓦwww.trinidadandtobagosurfexp.com), who offer lessons and board rental. Note that the water here is initially shallow and there's a reef directly offshore, so surf fins can be badly damaged and no protective footwear is allowed (this is done to protect the reef from over-eager surfers jumping in and damaging the coral).

Just to the south of the public area, past where fishermen sell their daily catch, the semi-private section of beach maintained by the *Mount Irvine* hotel offers even better swimming and excellent snorkelling, though it's perhaps less atmospheric, and parking is limited. Non-guests are welcome to swim; recliners are available to rent, and there's a restaurant serving lunch and drinks.

If you want an even quieter swathe of sand, head just north of the main Mount Irving beach; opposite Gleneagles Drive, a dirt track from the main road leads to **Back Bay**, a gorgeous and completely undeveloped swathe of sand with several very photogenic rocky outcrops. As currents can be dangerous, however, it's best to stick to paddling – and as this is a remote spot and robberies have occurred, you're well advised to leave your belongings on one of the rocks rather than the sand, and visit in a group.

Kimme Museum

Nestled in the hills behind the beach along Orange Hill Road – take the right turn just past the Mount Irvine golf course then follow the signposts – is the **Kimme Museum** (open Sun only, 10am–2pm, appointments taken for other days; TT$20; Ⓣ639 0257, Ⓦwww.luisekimme.com), the private gallery of German sculptor Luise Kimme, who settled in Tobago in 1979. Her eerily beguiling wood sculptures are dotted around the surrounds of her quirky, mural-decorated turreted home, the "Fairyhaus". The collection is stunning: 3m-high figures carved from whole trunks of oak depict the subtlest nuances of Tobagonian dancing, and her interpretations of local folklore characters Mama L'Eau, La Diablesse and the Soucouyant are powerful. Meeting Luise Kimme – ever the eccentric artist – is an experience in itself; she's usually on hand to provide further insight into her work. Books of photographs of her pieces are on sale, as is *Chachalaca*, the evocative diary of her early years in Tobago.

Practicalities

Most of the **accommodation** hereabouts tends to be opulent villas on and around the golf course (see box, p.228); the only alternative is the *Mount Irvine Bay Hotel and Golf Club* (Ⓣ639 8871, Ⓦwww.mtirvine.com; ⑥). The grand old lady of Tobago hotels, this sprawling property has tennis courts, sauna, huge pool, three restaurants and five bars. Rooms are spacious and well equipped, with air conditioning, phone, satellite TV and patio, though they're a little overpriced.

▲ Statues at the Kimme Museum, Mount Irvine

As to **eating** options, the closest restaurants are back along Shirvan Road or in Pleasant Prospect (see p.229), but *Surfer's* beach bar at Mount Irvine main beach does reliable local food such as shark 'n' bake or fish and chips, and the line of wooden shacks above the car park offer good local food; best option is 🏃 *Jackie's*, where you'll get some of the best roti in Tobago – as evidenced by the fact that food is often sold out early; call ahead on ⓣ767 9385 to check or place an order.

Grafton to Turtle Beach

Past Mount Irvine, Shirvan Road becomes Grafton Road. Its narrower forefather, Old Stonehaven Road (marked by a flurry of signs advertising villas and hotels) turns off to the left and runs along almost the whole length of **Grafton Beach** (also known as Stonehaven Bay). A glorious, wide swathe with coarse sand that attracts turtles to lay eggs, the beach offers some great swimming, and is deliciously uncommercialized. The presence of two large hotels overlooking the sand detracts little from the beauty of the place (both are almost always practically empty in any case), and in fact the *Grafton*'s beach bar is a decent place to grab a beer or sandwich lunch.

Opposite the southern end of Old Stonehaven Road, and looping off the main road in a crescent, the main street of **Pleasant Prospect** offers a smattering of restaurants and bars kept busy by Mount Irvine surfers. The area comes into its own after dark, when music wafts from the bars, limers hang out in the street and diners drift in an out of the restaurants.

Past Pleasant Prospect, a sun-bleached sign on the right of Grafton Road marks the entrance to the **Grafton Caledonia Bird Sanctuary** (daylight hours; free). Now somewhat run-down, the sanctuary was founded by the late owner of the surrounding estate, Eleanor Alefounder, who began feeding hungry local birds following the devastation wreaked by Hurricane Flora in 1963 (see p.249). Today, 4pm is feeding time for mot-mots, cocricos, bananaquits and practically every other feathered specimen found on the island, many of which will peck right out of your hand. There are extensive trails through the property which make for excellent, easy and scenic **hiking**.

Black Rock

Continuing northeast past Grafton Beach, the main road narrows as it swings through **Black Rock**, a busy, friendly village with a couple of nice rum bars and a sprinkling of grocery stores. On the western outskirts of town, where Old Stonehaven Road loops back up from the sea, is a signpost for **Fort Bennet**, a still-intact stockade built by English mercenary Lieutenant Robert Bennet in 1680. During the plantation era, the fort was expanded by British troops, who built a brick oven to heat up the metal used to make cannonballs and placed two cannons here to defend the bay against US privateers during the American War of Independence. A gazebo has been added, and the view over Mount Irvine Bay and the Pigeon Point headland is spectacular, particularly at sunset. Close by is the Cultur-Barn (☎639 9022), a small shop run by Malcolm Melville, renowned internationally for his unique and innovative hand-crafted drums.

Villas

Though **villas** are conventionally seen as luxury accommodation, they can work out to be quite cost effective if you're travelling in a large group. Most of the newer villas are aimed at the wealthier traveller and the majority are set around the Mount Irvine golf course. Unfortunately, due to their sometimes isolated locations and the lack of round-the-clock security, villas have become the number-one target of the criminal element that has surfaced in Tobago in recent years. In the reviews of individual villas that are included in accommodation listings for each area we have mentioned any relevant **security issues**, and see also p.204 for further advice when staying at a villa.

When renting, you'll often have to deal with an agency: Villas of Tobago (☎639 9600, Ⓦwww.villasoftobago.com) is a well-established and professional operation with an excellent range of properties for all budgets. The My Tobago website also lists a good selection of villas at Ⓦwww.mytobago.info/tobago-villas1.htm. Of individual properties here, *Tobago Villas on the Green*, Jacamar Drive (☎718 4306, Ⓦwww.tobagovillasonthegreen.com), has five three-bedroom villas in fenced-off grounds with 24-hour security. Each has a small pool, jacuzzi, and every imaginable amenity, and there's also a large communal pool.

Practicalities

There are a couple of **hotels** on Grafton beach, as well as a smattering of **villas**, (see box opposite) both overlooking the sand and inland. Note that the *Grafton Beach Resort* on Grafton Bay was closed at the time of writing while its controversial owner awaits possible extradition to the US on fraud charges.

The area also features some excellent **restaurants**, with Pleasant Prospect home to several great places to eat for all budgets.

Hotels and guesthouses

Le Grand Courlan Stonehaven Bay Rd, Black Rock Ⓣ639 9667, Ⓦwww.legrandtobago.com. Decked out in a horribly garish orange paint job, this sister hotel of the *Grafton* is a hit-and-miss affair whose patchy management hasn't managed to capitalize on the excellent beachside location and extensive facilities, which include a pool, tennis courts, spa and gym. Rooms have all the usual amenities, but overall it's a characterless and rather forlorn kind of place. ⑥

Seahorse Inn Stonehaven Bay Rd, Black Rock. Ⓣ639 0686, Ⓦwww.seahorseinntobago.com. Small hotel right on a turtle-nesting beach offering four comfortable rooms with appealing quirks like arched windows and teak floors. Rooms come with a/c, ceiling fan, en-suite bathroom, cable TV and patios with great sea views. There's a good restaurant on site (rates include continental breakfast) and evening entertainment during high season. ⑤

Villas

Coral Sunset House Black Rock Ⓣ639 9600, in US 1-207-671 0619 Ⓦwww.tobagohouserentals.com. This fabulous villa close to both Grafton and Turtle beaches was lovingly designed, built and decorated by an American surfer. With spectacular views and a unique combination of luxury and quirky, the villa sleeps up to six and is a gem. There's also a 1-bedroom apartment (③) downstairs.

Jema's Turtle Beach/Stonehaven Bay Ⓣ639 7724, in Germany Ⓣ89/461 49580, Ⓦwww.jemas-guesthouse.de. Tucked away in a quiet spot behind Turtle Beach, this three-bedroom house is beautifully decorated with rattan furniture and has a nice veranda. The simple rooms have fans, there's a kitchen and washing machine, and you're 100m from the beach. You can also rent rooms separately (③).

Plantation Beach Villas Stonehaven Bay Rd, Black Rock Ⓣ639 9377, Ⓦwww.plantationbeachvillas.com. Gorgeous three-bedroom villas set in lush gardens, beautifully designed and with gingerbread fretwork and wraparound verandas overlooking the sea. Four-poster beds, rocking chairs and all mod cons – including wi-fi – as well as washing machine, dryer and well-equipped kitchen and spacious living room complete the perfection. There's a shared bar and pool, the sea is a minute away and the staff are efficient and supremely friendly.

Sanctuary Villa Resort Grafton Estate Ⓣ639 9556, Ⓕ639 0019, Ⓦwww.sanctuaryvillas.com. Attractive and well designed, these 29 two-, three- and four-bedroom villas have all mod cons, TV, a/c, phone, veranda, full kitchen, beautifully decorated living room and private swimming pool or plunge pool. Peaceful location opposite Grafton Beach with good security.

The Villas at Stonehaven Grafton Estate, Black Rock Ⓣ639 0361 Ⓕ639 0102, Ⓦwww.stonehavenvillas.com. Fourteen huge and very expensive villas fitted with mahogany, marble and granite and every conceivable luxury: four-poster beds, a maid's room for those travelling with servants, personal pool and stunning views over Stonehaven Bay. The very secure complex includes a clubhouse with bar and open-air restaurant.

Restaurants and bars

The Fish Pot Pleasant Prospect Ⓣ639 9635. Friendly restaurant/bar with medium-priced blackboard menu dominated by super-fresh seafood, grilled or pan-fried in clever combinations of spices and fresh herbs, as well as starters of goat's cheese salad and steaks. The raised deck overlooking Pleasant Prospect is great for watching the world go by, and there's live music on Fri. Closed Sun, and Mon & Tues eves.

Jazzy & Roy's Pleasant Prospect. At the bottom end of the crescent, this is a tiny hole-in-the-wall place serving up decent seafood and chicken with all the usual sides, plus rotis. A couple of tables out front, and takeaway is available.

Moon Over Water Pleasant Prospect. This cool little bar, pumping mellow reggae out over the lower end of the crescent, makes a nice place to chill out over a beer or shoot some pool.

Moncheri Black Rock. With tables on a veranda, this is a decent if uninspiring option for inexpensive local lunches, usually fish or chicken served with peas, macaroni pie and salad.

Ocean Edge Grafton Rd, Black Rock. Across the road from *Pizza Boys*, this unpretentious rum shop is perched on a cliff top overlooking Stonehaven Bay and is a picturesque spot for a drink, especially during the sunset hours when the view over the ocean comes into it's own.

Rituals/Pizza Boys Pleasant Prospect Ⓣ712 7490. This coffeshop chain is a somewhat incongruous presence in boho Pleasant Prospect, doling out its usual lattes, cappuccinos, smoothies and iced coffees. Pastries and Jamaican patties are also available, and though they're not the best on the island, the pizzas are decent enough after a day on the beach.

Seahorse Inn Stonehaven Bay Rd, Black Rock Ⓣ639 0686. Imaginative and expensive menu with well-executed appetizers such seafood tempura or goat's cheese tart, and excellent scallop risotto, organic steaks and plenty of fish and seafood for the main course. Good desserts, one of the best wine lists in Tobago and English beers, too. Happy hour 5.30pm–6.30pm and live entertainment Mon, Tues & Thurs.

Signature Lounge Pleasant Prospect. Busy upstairs bar with a veranda overlooking Pleasant Prospect and a funky crowd of locals and visitors who pile into the cavernous interior for karaoke on Wednesdays, the Lyrical Lounge open mic night on Thursdays and the Friday party night. A great antidote to Crown Point nightlife.

Turtle Beach

Beyond Black Rock, the road swings around a blind bend before entering a straight stretch. Trees mask lovely **Turtle Beach**, a picturesque kilometre of coarse yellow sand flecked with the occasional swathe of volcanic grey; there are several dirt tracks from which to enter the bay from the road. The water shelves steeply from the beach and the waves are large, making for exhilarating swimming, while a river at the western end can sometimes be nice for a freshwater dip, but it's often dammed up and stagnant in the dry season. Jealously guarding pole position in the centre of the bay (only guests are allowed to use the thatched sunshades), the two-storey all-inclusive *Turtle Beach* hotel (Ⓣ639 2851, Ⓦwww.rexresorts.com; ⑨) dominates the sand, and the constant presence of its guests has generated an ideal captive market for vendors selling sarongs and crafts or touting an aloe massage.

Though the beach is officially called **Great Courland Bay**, it acquired its colloquial title on account of the leatherback **turtles** that still lay eggs here in the dark of night (see *The great outdoors* colour section). The main laying season runs between March and August, and six weeks after the eggs are laid, hatchlings make a dash for the sea; both equally moving sights. All of the hotels along this stretch organize a turtle watch during the laying and hatching seasons, but if you're not staying in the area, contact one of the tour companies listed on p.208. Save Our Sea Turtles Tobago (Ⓣ639 9669, Ⓦwww.sos-tobago.org), a locally run charity, often do free lectures on turtle nesting during the season, and their website has plenty of more detailed information.

Plymouth and around

Roughly a kilometre past Turtle Beach, Grafton Road meets a junction: going straight will put you on Wilson Road to Scarborough, while to the left, a narrow over the Courland River brings you to the outskirts of **PLYMOUTH**. Tobago's first European community, Plymouth was settled by a group of roving Latvians, usually referred to as Courlanders, then by the Dutch and finally by the British (see p.204). Today, it's an attractive little town, predominantly residential, with neat board houses lining the grid-patterned streets and a handful of very low-key historical sights.

Life in Plymouth centres around *TJ's Grocery & Bar* at the junction of Shelbourne and Halifax streets – inexpensive roti and other Creole **food** is available at the upstairs bar. Otherwise, there are a couple of places selling local food on the main street; *Petty Loo's* is particularly good, with barbecue at the weekends. If you're driving up the coast, it's wise to fill your tank at Plymouth's **petrol station**, located next to *TJ's*, as it's the only one for miles (Mon–Sat 7am–9pm, Sun 7am–noon).

Accommodation

Plymouth and its environs make a great base if you like things quiet and have your own transport. There are a couple of simple **hotels** in Plymouth itself, while the road leading north to Arnos Vale and beyond is peppered with more luxurious establishments in woodsy locations.

Adventure Eco Villas Arnos Vale Rd, Plymouth ⓣ639 2839, ⓦwww.adventure-ecovillas.com. An oasis for birdwatchers, these two lovely villas are built out of Guyanese greenheart wood and perched over a tree-filled valley in the Adventure Farm and Nature Reserve (see p.232), with a large shared deck area. Both have a kitchen, a/c, cable TV and screened windows. A cheaper apartment in the main house is also available. ⑤

Arnos Vale Arnos Vale Estate ⓣ639 2881, ⓦwww.arnosvalehotel.com. Set in fifty hillside acres of beautiful bird- and flower-filled land and above a gorgeous protected cove of sand and reef-filled sea, renowned for its snorkelling, this could be the best spot on the island. However, there's a neglected air of a place long past its heyday, and the rooms are in need of an update. Nonetheless, there's a pool and tennis courts, and the many bird feeders ensure plenty of avian action. ⑤

Changrela North St, at Commissioner, Plymouth ⓣ639 2961, ⓦwww.changrela.com. Formerly the *Cocrico Inn*, this comfortable and friendly place has a restaurant, pool and quiet location in residential backstreets. Eclectic accommodation ranges from clean, simple rooms with fan to larger units with a/c, fridge, cable TV and kitchen. Wi-fi available. ③

Footprints Culloden Bay Rd, via Golden Lane ⓣ660 0416, ⓦwww.footprints-resort.com. Overlooking Culloden Bay, this remote, 62-acre self-styled "eco resort" (it uses lots of recycled or recyclable materials) has its own nature trails, saltwater pools, excellent snorkelling just steps from the rooms and plenty of peace and quiet. Accommodation ranges from standard suites to self-contained villas with jacuzzi and pool, and there's a restaurant on site. ⑤–⑨

Top O' Tobago Arnos Vale Estate ⓣ639 3166 or 687 0121, ⓦwww.topotobago.com. Perched above Arnos Vale Bay and cooled by constant breezes, this is a unique and beguiling place with great hill and sea views and plenty of birdlife. Stylishly decorated with great attention to detail, the main two-bedroom house sleeps up to six and has a large sitting room, two bathrooms, fully equipped kitchen, patio, flat-screen TV, stereo, and washer and dryer. Smaller cabanas are equally appealing, and all have use of the pool. Free airport pick-up, and wonderful personalized service. Cabana ⑥ cabana/house ⑨

Tropical Pleasure River Rd, Plymouth ⓣ660 2222, ⓦwww.tropicalpleasure.net. Incongruously large, orange-painted block on your left as you enter Plymouth, where the spanking-new rooms have a/c, cable TV, kitchenette and patio. Not very atmospheric but reasonably priced and a good base from which to explore the area. ③

The Town

Turning left at *TJ's* and continuing down Shelbourne Street will take you to Plymouth's main attractions: the so-called **mystery tombstone** and **Fort James**. Well signposted and sitting alone on a concrete platform close to the sea, about 200m down Shelbourne Street from *TJ's*, the eighteenth-century tombstone is an enigmatic, if rather depressing, reminder of Tobago's history of slavery. The double grave of a child and her 23-year-old mother, Betty Stiven, the "mystery" is the inscription on the stone slab: "What was remarkable of her; she was a mother without knowing it, and a wife without letting her husband know it, except by her kind indulgences to him." Betty is said to have been the African slave (and lover) of Alex Stiven, a wealthy Dutch planter, and the general hypothesis has two strands. In the first theory, she gave birth to Stiven's child and he took charge of it, raising it as his but not acknowledging Betty as the mother, giving her "freedom" to carry on as his lover and making her a "mother without knowing it". The other theory proposes that the affair between Alex and Betty was illicit and scandalous but passionate, carried out in secret to save the face of a white man. When, in 1783, she died giving birth to his child, he was so overcome with grief that he left this cryptic message as a commemoration of their love.

A few metres before the tombstone, a road opposite leads down to the stark concrete blocks of the **Great Courland Bay Monument**, testament to the "bold, enterprising and industrious" Latvians who colonized the area and lent their name to the bay.

Carrying straight on past the tombstone brings you to Fort James, the oldest stockade in Tobago, dating from 1650. The solid coral-stone structure and four cannons that remain today are a British legacy, added in 1811, and there's an excellent view of Turtle Beach from the lawns in front.

The Plymouth main road leads back onto the Arnos Vale Road, where, on the eastern outskirts of town, a sign directs you to the **Adventure Farm and Nature Reserve** (daily 9am–5pm; TT$30; ☎639 2839). There's little adventure to be had on this twelve-acre site, though there is plenty of nature with mot-mots, green herons, cocricos and other birds that regularly appear to feed in the late afternoon to the sound of an antique ship's bell, while hummingbirds flit around the sugar-water feeders all day long. There's also a butterfly garden and an organic farm where you can pick fruit such as oranges and grapefruit.

Arnos Vale to Les Coteaux

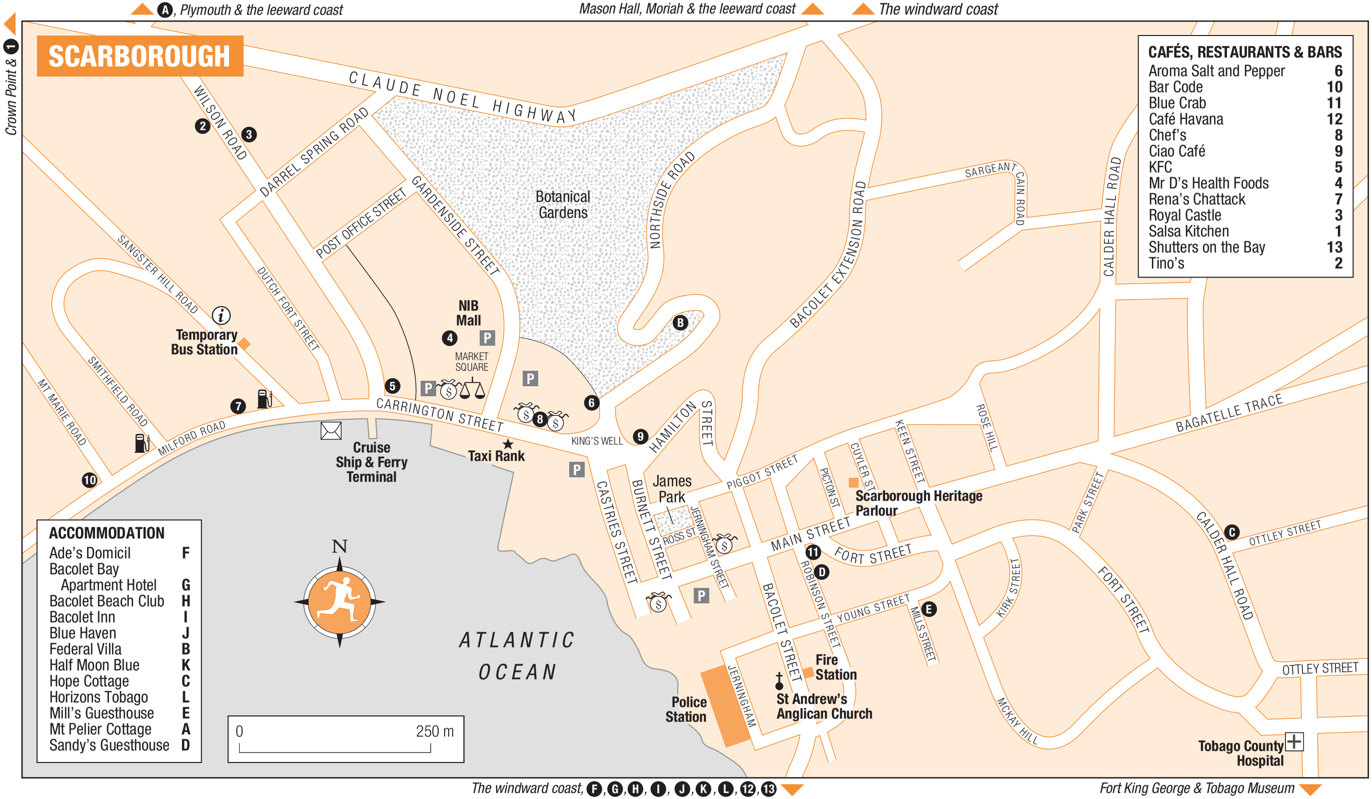
Cutting off to the right from the Plymouth main road as you enter town, the well-signposted Arnos Vale Road meanders through the greenery towards **Arnos Vale**, one of the few sugar estates to keep its land, parts of which have been opened up to the public, while a resort hotel straddles the beachfront section of the property (see p.231). The main point of access is at the old estate **water wheel** (daily 9am–10.30pm; TT$12; ☎660 0815) where a modest **museum** displays a small selection of Amerindian pottery and colonial artefacts found on the estate, while wooden walkways allow you to view the atmospheric remains of the large wheel, pump, fermenting house and steam train that once transported sugar around the plantation. However, at the time of writing the complex was a bit run-down and its **restaurant** only intermittently open; call ahead before visiting.

Beyond Arnos Vale, the road heads into the hills and through the tiny but attractive villages of **Golden Lane** and **Les Coteaux**; the latter is said to be a centre for obeah, and rumours of witchery and potions abound – the community hosts spooky story sessions during the Heritage Festival celebrations. Road improvements have linked Arnos Vale with the rest of the leeward coast, but you can also get to neighbouring Moriah and Castara from Scarborough via the Northside Road (see p.241), which connects with the Arnos Vale Road at Moriah.

Scarborough

Tobago's raucous, hot and dusty capital, precipitous **SCARBOROUGH** (population 18,000), is a surprisingly appealing place. Poking through the treetops, the houses and roads of this town spill higgledy-piggledy down the hillside while the Atlantic provides a magnificent backdrop for **Fort King George**, perched at the top of the hill. The island's administrative centre and its main **port**, Scarborough is a

SCARBOROUGH



CAFÉS, RESTAURANTS & BARS	
Aroma Salt and Pepper	6
Bar Code	10
Blue Crab	11
Café Havana	12
Chef's	8
Ciao Café	9
KFC	5
Mr D's Health Foods	4
Rena's Chattack	7
Royal Castle	3
Salsa Kitchen	1
Shutters on the Bay	13
Tino's	2

ACCOMMODATION	
Ade's Domicil	F
Bacolet Bay Apartment Hotel	G
Bacolet Beach Club	H
Bacolet Inn	I
Blue Haven	J
Federal Villa	B
Half Moon Blue	K
Hope Cottage	C
Horizons Tobago	L
Mill's Guesthouse	E
Mt Pelier Cottage	A
Sandy's Guesthouse	D

Crown Point & 1
A, Plymouth & the leeward coast
Mason Hall, Moriah & the leeward coast
The windward coast
The windward coast, F, G, H, I, J, K, L, 12, 13
Fort King George & Tobago Museum
CLAUDE NOEL HIGHWAY
WILSON ROAD
DARREL SPRING ROAD
SANGSTER HILL ROAD
DUTCH FORT STREET
POST OFFICE STREET
GARDENSIDE STREET
Botanical Gardens
NORTHSIDE ROAD
BACOLET EXTENSION ROAD
SARGEANT
CAIN ROAD
CALDER HALL ROAD
Temporary Bus Station
SMITHFIELD ROAD
MT MARIE ROAD
MILFORD ROAD
NIB Mall
MARKET SQUARE
P
CARRINGTON STREET
Cruise Ship & Ferry Terminal
Taxi Rank
KING'S WELL
HAMILTON STREET
CASTRIES STREET
BURNETT STREET
James Park
ROSS ST
JERNINGHAM STREET
PIGGOT STREET
PICTON ST
CUYLER ST
KEEN STREET
ROSE HILL
Scarborough Heritage Parlour
MAIN STREET
FORT STREET
ROBINSON STREET
BACOLET STREET
YOUNG STREET
MILLS STREET
KIRK STREET
PARK STREET
BAGATELLE TRACE
OTTLEY STREET
MCKAY HILL
Fire Station
St Andrew's Anglican Church
Police Station
JERNINGHAM
Tobago County Hospital
ATLANTIC OCEAN
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A B C D E

flourishing town, brimming with a brisk vibrancy. Devoid of any touristy pretensions, its street corners buzz with liming locals, while streetside stalls are perused by shoppers and the bars spill out onto the streets. Away from the bustle, the shady suburb of **Bacolet** is home to some of Tobago's most upmarket hotels and the secluded Bacolet Bay beach – in former times the playground of many a rich and famous visitor to Tobago.

Though the largest town on the island, Scarborough is still pretty tiny, with most of the commercial action spreading back up from the port and along the precipitous Main Street. The heat, traffic and steep climbs can make it a bit tiring to explore, but the cool breezes and views from the port and the elevated parts of town offer respite.

Some history

The **Dutch** were the first Europeans to settle what became one of Tobago's most hotly contested pieces of land. They navigated the treacherous harbour rocks in 1654, and constructed a fort and a few buildings, naming it **Lampsinsburgh**. Around the same time, a group of Courlanders (Latvians) were building up their stronghold on the opposite coast at Plymouth (see p.230). In 1658, the Dutch captured Plymouth – an act that led to the destruction of their own settlement when, in 1666, a British fleet came to the aid of the Latvians and blew Lampsinsburgh to smithereens.

The British officially won the island in 1672, but didn't maintain a presence, allowing the Dutch to return and build Lampsinsburgh into a more substantial settlement, with houses, a single street and a church, as well as warehouses and wharves at the harbour and a new fort. However, during the French assault of 1677, the newly improved fortifications proved to be the undoing of the Dutch; a French cannonball hit the fort's ammunition dump, and the resulting fireball destroyed the structure and killed all 250 occupants. Though still commemorated in the current name Dutch Fort Road, there's nothing left today of that original settlement.

The British bestowed the name **Scarborough** when they regained control of Tobago in 1762, establishing the House of Assembly here and constructing Fort King George. The **French** returned to take control, after a bloody and prolonged fight, in 1781. Scarborough was renamed Port Louis, while Fort King George – with finishing touches added by French soldiers – became **Fort Castries**. The town ricocheted between the British and French until Tobago was finally ceded to the British in 1814.

Arrival, getting around and information

Most people enter Scarborough by **road** along the Wilson Road turn-off from Claude Noel Highway and follow the one-way system towards the wharves bordering Carrington Street. This is where you'll find the central terminal for **ferries** to and from Trinidad (for departures and prices, see p.25), which is the other primary means of arrival into the town. Free parking is available at the wharf lot on the corner of Carrington and Castries streets, in the NIB Mall car park off Gardenside Street (strictly speaking for shoppers only) and in the huge lot off Gardenside Street.

There are two **private taxi** stands on Carrington Street, a one-minute walk from the ferry terminal, while the **bus depot** is located five minutes away on Sangster Hill Road – this is actually the temporary station while the main depot on Gardenside Street behind the NIB Mall is being rebuilt; the work seems unlikely to be completed during the lifetime of this edition. Buses to all corners of the island run daily between roughly 4.30am and 8pm; for details see p.207, and remember to purchase your tickets before boarding. As Scarborough is so small, there are no bus

Moving on from Scarborough

Scarborough is the departure point for **route taxis** serving the whole of the island, though finding where to catch your ride can be confusing. For Crown Point, Bon Accord, Mount Irvine, Buccoo, Carnbee, Bethel, Mount Pleasant, Plymouth, Black Rock and Lambeau go to the "**west end**" **taxi stand** directly outside the ferry terminal. There are two lanes: the one nearest the terminal is for Crown Point and places along Milford Road; the outside lane is for all other destinations. An alternative departure point for Plymouth, Black Rock and Mount Pleasant is on **Wilson Road** opposite *KFC*, at the junction with Carrington Street. This is also where you'll find taxis running the Northside Road to Castara and Parlatuvier. If you have no luck here, walk 50m or so up Wilson Road to Penny Savers supermarket, where you can find transport to Mason Hall, from where it's easier to get taxis going further up Northside Road. Taxis to Speyside and Charlotteville leave from Republic Bank on **Main Street** and sometimes from next to St James Park. Alternatively, maxis to Charlotteville leave a few times a day from next to James Park on **Ross Street**. With all of these taxi stands it can be confusing to know exactly where to wait – but if you're not sure just ask around.

services within the town, but that's no problem as you can easily see all the sights on foot. Alternatively, **route taxi** drivers ply certain urban routes, such as the steep uphill climb to the hospital and Fort King George.

For **information**, head to the offices of the Tobago House of Assembly Division of Tourism, close to the bus station at 12 Sangster Hill (Mon–Fri 8am–4pm; ⓣ639 2125, ⓦwww.visittobago.gov.tt).

Scarborough has several **banks**: there's the Republic Bank and Scotiabank on Carrington Street opposite the wharf, Royal and Republic banks on Main Street and First Citizens Bank in the NIB Mall. All have ATMs; there is also one at the ferry terminal. There are two **petrol stations** on Milford Road.

Accommodation

Though Scarborough and the Bacolet suburbs were popular in the 1960s and 1970s during the early years of Tobagonian tourism, they've now been eclipsed by Crown Point. Some excellent **hotels** remain in Bacolet, while Scarborough has some inexpensive options, especially convenient if you're catching an early ferry. Staying in a **host home** or B&B (see Basics, p.27) is another viable budget option.

Ade's Domicil 19 Old Lighthouse Rd, Bacolet Point ⓣ639 4306, ⓦwww.adesdomicil.de. This lovely spacious white plantation-style house is 250m from the beach. Both the studio and one-bedroom apartment have en-suite bathroom, a/c and ceiling fan, cable TV, fully equipped kitchen and a sea view. Good value. ③

Bacolet Bay Apartment Hotel Bacolet St, Bacolet ⓣ639 2955. Quite shabby but friendly, very inexpensive for this area and just a step away from Bacolet Beach. Studios have kitchen, TV, a/c and a private balcony; there's also a decent pool on site. ②

Bacolet Beach Club Bacolet Bay ⓣ639 2357, ⓦwww.bacoletbeachclub.com. Chic boutique hotel, with a fabulous infinity pool and a small, effectively private, beach. Rooms and suites are decked out in a quirky vintage-meets-modern style, and all have a/c, flat-screen TV/CD/DVD player and balcony. A cute little bridge leads to the excellent on-site restaurant. ⑧–⑨

Bacolet Inn 36 Bacolet St, Bacolet ⓣ639 2531 or 313 3507. Set in a pretty old house with lovely sea views and a pool in the garden. The simple rooms with bathroom, cable TV and a/c are clean and good value, and there's a shared kitchen and TV area. It's a ten-minute walk to Scarborough. ③

Blue Haven Bacolet Bay ⓣ660 7400, ⓦwww.bluehavenhotel.com. This historic hotel was originally an outpost of Fort King George and retains its stunning panoramic views of the bay it once protected. The stylish rooms have four-poster or sleigh beds, gorgeous wooden floors, a/c, TV, minibar, phone, spacious bathrooms and a balcony overlooking stunning Bacolet Bay. There's a swimming pool with ornamental waterfall, mini-gym, spa and tennis court, and an excellent restaurant on site as well as a small bar on the adjacent Bacolet Beach. Scarborough is a twenty-minute walk away. ⑧–⑨

Federal Villa 1–3 Crooks River, Scarborough ⓣ639 3926. Some of the cheapest rooms in Tobago, even if they are all very basic, with fan and shared bathroom. Pleasant location near the Botanical Gardens. ②

Half Moon Blue 73 Bacolet St, Bacolet ⓣ639 3551, ⓦwww.halfmoonblue.com. Comfortable en-suite rooms decorated in an unusual mixture of traditional and modern styles, with a/c, fan, fridge, TV, phone, hairdryer and great views of Bacolet Bay from private balconies; there's also access to a "private" beach. The open-plan penthouse suite is gorgeous, if you've got the money. There's also a spacious garden and a dreamy infinity pool; rates include a hearty breakfast. ⑥–⑧

Hope Cottage Calder Hall Rd, Scarborough ⓣ639 2179, ⓔhcghtobago@hotmail.com. Formerly the residence of the governor of Tobago (who is buried in the back garden), this is one of Tobago's oldest guesthouses, having opened its doors to visitors in 1940. Showing its age a bit nowadays, but a great bargain nonetheless. Rooms are plain, with shared bathroom, and there's a large communal kitchen. Genial hosts and a peaceful location in a hilly part of town close to Fort King George. ②

Horizons Tobago 89 Bacolet Point, in UK ⓣ0121 707 7503, ⓦwww.horizonstobago.com. Cream-and-brown building in a lush setting housing four apartments, one- and two-bedroom, furnished with rattan and decorated with local artwork; all have a/c, phones, cable TV, kitchens and mosquito nets. There's a swimming pool, a shared utility area for washing clothes, and maid service is also provided. Good security. ③

Mill's Guesthouse Young St, Scarborough ⓣ639 2193, ⓔcristalj@hotmail.com. The rooms of this pretty, blue guesthouse set high on a hillside are pleasant and well maintained – some have a/c and TV and there's a well-equipped communal kitchen. ③

Mt Pelier Cottage Montpelier ⓣ639 4931, ⓦwww.tobagoretreats.com. Unique and utterly fabulous home away from home in the hosts' self-built wooden house perched on Scarborough's hillside. The airy rooms have lattice windows, creative hand-carved decor and lovely mosaiced bathrooms, and there's a tree-shaded pool. Meals are served on a balcony overlooking the forest and frequented by many birds, and the very reasonable rates include excellent home-cooked breakfast, huge evening meals, airport pick-up, trips to beaches and a river hike. ④

Sandy's Guesthouse 5 Robinson St, Scarborough ⓣ639 2737, ⓕ639 2270, ⓦwww.tobagobluecrab.com. Run by Auntie Alison, the hospitable owner of the *Blue Crab* restaurant (see p.240), this wonderful guesthouse has four pretty, spotless and large rooms with a/c, private bathroom, TV and fridge; rates include breakfast. ③

Lower Scarborough

Lower Scarborough constitutes the area around the market and the port and is where you'll find most of the action, with shoppers, office workers, taxi drivers and street vendors giving the place a hectic feel. Entering via car-choked Wilson Road, a left on Darrel Spring Road and then a right down Gardenside Street will take you past the back of **NIB Mall** to the right, and the **Botanical Gardens** (and a car park) to the left. Behind the mall is the capital's **market**. Main trading days are Friday and Saturday, but throughout the week, vociferous vendors sell every tropical fruit and vegetable imaginable. The indoor meat section is an odoriferous melange of goat, beef, lamb, mutton and chicken, while fish on ice gleam at the back section, where stallholders attract customers by blowing on a **conch shell**. It's a friendly and absorbing scene, great for bargains and a chat with the stallholders, who can explain how to cook any unfamiliar produce. If you're after souvenirs such as knitted Rasta hats, sandals and woodcarvings, or cheap CDs and DVDs, check out the stalls lining busy Wilson Road and the western side of NIB Mall.

A quieter way to enter the town is along the wide Milford Road, which leads back west to Little Rockly Bay and here runs adjacent to the **waterfront** – a breezy place to escape the crowds and noise of central Scarborough. Though some older buildings remain in Scarborough's steep heights, most of the waterfront is relatively new. Souped up in 1990 by the addition of a deep-water cruise-ship pier (the deep-water harbour was built in 1953), the harbour area is dominated by the modern **ferry terminal**. As well as the ferry ticket office, the complex holds a few shops and Scarborough's main **post office** (Mon–Fri 7.30am–6pm, Sat 9am–1pm). The circular wooden buildings on Milford's seafront **promenade** sell snacks and souvenirs, but only a few are open at any given time, and most of the activity is confined to the inland side of Milford Road which has some good bars and cafés.

The Botanical Gardens

Opposite the bus station construction site on Gardenside Street is the back entrance to the **Botanical Gardens** (daily, daylight hours; free), a soothing oasis after the heat-retaining concrete and constant traffic fumes of downtown; it can also be accessed from a signposted layby on the Claude Noel Highway or from Northside Road. Covering eighteen acres of what was once the Dal Fair and Rockly Vale sugar plantations, the land was requisitioned by the British in the late nineteenth century with the intention of creating a public botanical garden. Today, the broad sweeps of lawn interspersed with planted beds and shade trees could pass for an English park, were it not for the garish crimson of towering African tulips, flamboyant trees and the yellow and pink cascades of the poui trees. The gardens remain a firm favourite for wedding photos, as does the spanking new gazebo, but generally they're pretty much deserted. There are no guided **tours** as such, but the gardeners are usually on site to answer questions. Alternatively, trained forester and tour guide Darren Henry (Ⓣ639 4559) does a 45-minute tour of the gardens on request.

Upper Scarborough

Comprising the hilly streets on the eastern side of the town, **Upper Scarborough**, like Lower Scarborough, is a busy area with plenty of shops and banks, but gets steadily quieter the higher you climb.

Proceeding east from the ferry terminal along Carrington Street, you soon reach a junction known as **King's Well**, originally the site of the town's main watercourse, but now home to an excellent Italian café. A sharp left here takes you out of town along Northside Road and the edge of the Botanical Gardens, while the sharp right is Castries Street, the route to Main Street. Between the two, steeply inclining **Burnett Street** is one of Scarborough's best places for knick-knack **shopping** – anything from T-shirts to lingerie.

As Burnett reaches a plateau, you enter **James Park**, a small walled square decorated with Luise Kimme's bronze of A.P.T. James, a former Minister of Tobago Affairs. The park is bordered to the north by the imposing old **courthouse**, which has housed the administrative offices of the Tobago House of Assembly since the judiciary were shifted to their current Bacolet Street base in the late 1980s. Built between 1821 and 1825, the cut-stone structure was supposedly considered one of the finest examples of Georgian architecture in the Caribbean on completion. Subsequent alterations have, unfortunately, smothered the original brickwork with white paint and removed the pillars, leaving it a shadow of its former glory.

Main Street and around

Carrying straight on past James Park along Burnett Street brings you directly onto the bustling shop-and-office-lined **Main Street**. Some 50m uphill are traffic lights marking the right turn onto **Bacolet Street**, the route to the fire station, the main police station (and only jail) as well as **Gun Bridge**. This short bridge, just a minute's walk from the turning, marks the transition into Bacolet and has railings made from rifle barrels and stone walls embellished with four cannons, two at either end, taken from Fort George – a commemoration of the town's historical discord. A few metres past the bridge is **St Andrew's Anglican Church**, originally built in 1819 but razed by Hurricane Flora in 1963 and reconstructed a year later. The fire and police stations are opposite and behind the church respectively. Further south down Bacolet Street, the buildings thin out as you enter the quiet and attractive Bacolet suburbs (see p.240).

Fort King George

Forking off Main Street, Fort Street twists its way up a steep hill past the imposing Methodist Church and some attractive but dishevelled colonial architecture on its way to one of the most prominent sights in town, **Fort King George**. If the precipitous fifteen-minute walk looks too much and you decide to **drive**, you can almost always find a parking space in the lot adjacent to the museum and main fort. Refreshments are available at a few kiosks opposite the hospital.

The Fort King George complex is the largest fortification in Tobago, built by the British in 1777 and initially composed of some thirty buildings, but reduced to around ten by an 1847 hurricane. It was occupied by French troops between 1781 and 1793, who built the solid stone perimeter walls. Inspired by the French Revolution, the soldiers **mutinied** in 1790, imprisoning their officers and razing the town below. There are several signs dotted around the complex giving some background to the buildings, and you can also get a guided tour from one of the THA personnel in the Tourism division, to the left of the car park at the top of the fort area.

As you approach the complex, the first of the fort's buildings is a ruined red-brick **prison**; it hasn't undergone the restoration of the main buildings, and time and the elements have opened its tiny, dingy cells to shafts of sunlight. Around the next bend is **Tobago County Hospital** and the start of the fort complex proper. Just beyond the hospital, the first building on the left (near where the ambulances park) is the dome-shaped cover of an old **well**, built in 1926 to service the hospital. Over the road from the well, a path leads below the main

▲ Fort King George, Scarborough

Robinson Crusoe's isle

"The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe of York, Mariner; Who lived eight and twenty Years all alone, on an uninhabited Island on the coast of America, near the mouth of the Great River of Oroonoque; Having been Cast on Shore by shipwreck, wherein all the Men perished but himself." Thus reads the introductory blurb to the first edition of Daniel Defoe's **Robinson Crusoe**, dated April 25, 1719 and the oft-cited rationale behind the claim that Tobago was the setting for Defoe's story. In the book, the fabled island was situated, like Tobago, off the coast of (South) America near the mouth of the Orinoco River.

In the late seventeenth century, the then-sovereign Duke of Courland commissioned an Englishman, John Poyntz, to develop the island. Poyntz wrote a pamphlet praising Tobago's beauty and natural riches as well as giving a physical description of the island. Believers argue that Defoe got hold of the document and used it as the basis for his novel.

However, this clashes with the accepted notion that Defoe based the book on the experience of Alexander Selkirk, a crewmember on the ship of English explorer and pirate William Dampier. During a voyage in the Pacific Ocean, Selkirk quarrelled with another crew member and, rather than continue in his company, volunteered to be put ashore at the tiny island of Juan Fernandez, off the coast of Chile. He spent four years alone there before Dampier rescued him. After Selkirk's return to England in 1711, his story became well known through various pamphlets, on which Defoe's novel was almost certainly based.

complex to a landscaped **park**, lush with poui trees and colourful planted beds. Benches are perfectly placed for soaking up marvellous views of Scarborough and the Orange Hill district. In the shade of a massive, buttressed silk cotton tree is the (usually locked) **powder magazine**, a sturdy structure built to house stocks of ammunition and gunpowder.

At the top level of the complex, some 140m above sea level, the **Officer's Mess** is the fort's largest building, now housing the Tobago Museum. Beyond the Mess, a series of cannons point through cut-stone walls and out to sea; the walls afford spectacular views of Bacolet Bay, Minister Point and the rugged interior to the east, and Rockly Bay and the north coast of Trinidad to the west. Today, this peaceful spot is favoured for its constant sea breezes; by night it's a suitably deserted destination for a bit of in-car canoodling. Behind Mess is the **lighthouse**, a squat structure transferred from Galera Point in Trinidad in 1958; the Fresnel lens beams 50km out to sea and sweeps spectacularly over the Scarborough suburbs.

Tobago Museum

Laid out in the cool confines of the refurbished (and now air-conditioned) Officer's Mess, the **Tobago Museum** (Mon–Fri 9am–4.30pm, closed public holidays; TT$10) has a small but fascinating collection of idiosyncratic artefacts ranging from Amerindian occupation to the nineteenth century (as well as, rather incongruously, many pieces of Nigerian sculpture). There's an extensive collection of pre-Columbian axe-heads, chisels, cooking ware and talismans, known as adornos, found at Amerindian sites across the island, as well as racks of shells and fossils, and relics from the colonial era, from military ephemera to coins and notes and some rather chilling logs detailing names and "condition" of the slaves sold to the island's various estates. Look out also for satirical prints depicting the exploits of "Johnny Newcome in Love in the West Indies", and a copy of the second edition of the *Pleasant Prospect of the Famous and Fertile Island of Tobago* by John Poyntz, the pamphlet which local legend claims Daniel Defoe used as the inspiration for the setting of *Robinson Crusoe*.

Bacolet

As Bacolet Street eases out of town south along the coast past Sandy Hall and Fairfield Complex – the main administrative base of the Tobago House of Assembly as well as the Tobago Hall of Justice court and the island's main cemetery – the roadside homes become noticeably grander. Though **Bacolet** suffered a lull when its eponymous street was replaced by Claude Noel Highway as the main route to the windward coast, this is still a suburb of choice for Tobago's elite.

The area enjoyed a heady prestige during the late 1960s and early 70s, boasting a couple of luxury hotels, the *Bacolet* and *Blue Haven*. Rita Hayworth and Robert Mitchum stayed here while filming *Fire Down Below*, and the **Beatles** frolicked on Bacolet Bay beach, which also provided the setting for Walt Disney's *Swiss Family Robinson*. The *Blue Haven* (see p.235) was once part of Tobago's battlements: a cannon still stands on the hotel's grounds, the base of the hotel is surrounded by stone walls dating back to 1770 and the bay itself was the site of many sea battles. The hotels tried to cordon off the sand in the 1960s but Dr Eric Williams – the premier who once declared that he had no intention of ruling "a nation of waiters and bellhops" – intervened to keep the beach public.

The best reason to linger here has long been the charm of crescent-shaped **Bacolet Bay Beach**. It's a tranquil spot usually full with guests from the nearby hotels, with its yellow sand shaded by palms and Indian almond trees. The coral reef which protects it and Scarborough ensures good swimming despite the location on the Atlantic side of the island – but be aware of the occasional dangerous undercurrents and rough seas in winter. From the road, concrete steps lead down the cliff side to the sand, where a beach bar serves up ice-cold drinks.

South of the beach, the houses thin out as Bacolet Street swings left to meet with the highway and the traffic on its way along the windward coast (see p.250).

Eating, drinking and nightlife

Scarborough's **dining scene** offers everything from the excellent low-cost meals found all over town to Bacolet's exclusive eateries; in between, there are some excellent and unusual options, too. Fast-food outlets such as *KFC* on the corner of Wilson Road and Carrington Street, *Royal Castle* on Wilson Road and *Chef's* on Carrington Street all enjoy a strong local following. For drinks, there are plenty of **bars** along Carrington Street and Wilson Road well worth checking out, especially on Friday evenings when everybody celebrates the end of the working week.

Aroma Salt and Pepper Crooks River Mall. This bustling canteen-style café on the mall's second floor serves basic local dishes at low prices in an a/c dining room and has a pleasant setting overlooking King's Well.

Bar Code Milford Rd ☎635 2633. Scarborough's liveliest bar, complete with big screen TV for watching sports and pool tables; the breezy outside deck has lovely sea views, too. *Crystal Palace* casino is right next door.

Blue Crab Robinson St, at Main ☎639 2737. This busy, friendly restaurant has both and a/c dining room and a lovely shady terrace with sea views, and feels a million miles away from the bustle. The excellent Creole food is decently priced and popular with an office crowd; highlights are the green fig salad, pan-fried shark crab curry and the unsweetened, freshly squeezed juices. Lunch Tues–Fri 11am–3pm, tea and cakes served around 4.30pm, dinner by reservation only.

Café Havana Bacolet Bay ☎639 2357. Set in an airy split-level building, all white paint and wooden floors, this upmarket restaurant offers a slice of the urbane, with wraps, salads and burgers at lunchtime and a dinner menu that ranges from chilli-dusted calamari with aioli to shrimp gumbo to fresh fish, steak with Cuban bean salad or parmesan-breaded chicken with tomatoes and olives. It's also good for a drink, with excellent cocktails including proper mojitos.

Ciao Café King's Well ☎639 3001. This fantastic, popular Italian café and bar with outside terrace serves authentic cappuccino, over twenty different flavours of delicious home-made ice cream, fine Italian wine, good beer and

The great outdoors

Trinidad and Tobago aren't your typical sun'n'sand tropical islands. Having once been part of the South American landmass, they boast a natural diversity that's unmatched in the Caribbean, with an incredible richness in fauna and flora as well as pristine rainforest and miles of undeveloped coastline. From hiking and birdwatching to scuba diving, dipping into secluded waterfalls or watching turtles lay their eggs on the beach, there are endless opportunities for outdoor pursuits, and there are plenty of adventure-style tour companies on hand to help you explore it all.

Northern Range river walk, Paria ▲

Gasparee Caves, Gaspar Grande island ▲

Barred antshrike, Tobago ▼

Scarlet ibis, Caroni Swamp ▼

Into the rainforest

Eco-oriented T&T is one of the best places in the Caribbean to lace up your walking shoes and head for the hills. The oldest protected rainforest in the world, Tobago's **Forest Reserve** has some gentle trails, but Trinidad's rainforest-smothered **Northern Range** offers the best possibilities. You can **hike** through steamy jungles inhabited by reclusive ocelots, opossums and armadillos, with howler monkey calls echoing through the canopy. Squeezing and swimming your way through water-filled **Guanapo Gorge** or exploring deep limestone caves inhabited by bats and oilbirds offer more of an adrenaline buzz. You can even clamber up Trinidad's highest mountain, **El Cerro del Aripo** or, down south, kayak though the incredible wetlands of the **Nariva Swamp**.

Trinidad and Tobago also rank as one of the world's best **birdwatching** destinations. Of the 430-plus recorded species, many boast flashy plumage that will turn your head even if you're not naturally given to things avian – it's hard to forget your first sight of a toucan peering down through the foliage or the jewel-like flash of a hummingbird whirring past your nose, while the thousands of scarlet ibis that roost at Caroni swamp turn the mangroves a spectacular crimson each evening.

Getting wet

Though sediments from Venezuela's Orinoco River make diving in Trinidad's waters fairly unpromising, the same nutrients feed a rich reef system off Tobago's Caribbean shores, making for some brilliant and varied **scuba diving** and

Leatherback turtles

Weighing up to 700kg and measuring up to a metre across, **leatherback turtles** have undergone few evolutionary alterations in their 150-million-year history. Named for the soft, leathery texture of their ridged carapace (more like a skin than a shell, which bleeds if cut), leatherbacks spend most of the year in temperate waters gorging on jellyfish, but during the egg-laying season (March–July), females swim thousands of miles, returning to the beach of their birth to lay eggs in the sand under the cover of night. Sixty days later, **hatchlings** emerge and make a moon-guided dash for the sea.

Leatherbacks can return to the same beach up to ten times per season – a necessary repetition, as only sixty percent of all eggs mature into hatchlings (many are dug up by dogs or poachers), and only one or two from each clutch become fully-grown turtles. The best spots for turtle-watching are **Matura** and **Grande Riviere** in Trinidad (see p.148 & 152); **Grafton** and **Turtle** beaches in Tobago (see p.227 & 230) still see the odd leatherback, too; see the box on p.148 for a rundown of the practicalities involved.

snorkelling, from challenging drift dives to gentle explorations of sheltered reefs. Some of the world's largest recorded **brain corals** (some 4m across) are found off Little Tobago in the northeast, while rare cup corals and red-polyp octocorals thrive among the more common staghorn and fire varieties. Tobago is also known for its deep-water pelagics: the **manta rays** that inhabit the waters off Speyside comprise one of the largest permanent populations in the world. And even if you can't dive, glass-bottom boats can take you over the best of the reefs and usually stop off for a spot of snorkelling.

▲ Leatherback turtle hatchling, Grande Riviere

▲ Scuba boat, Tobago

▼ Speyside, Tobago

Avocat Falls, Trinidad ▲

Hibiscus flower, Northern Range ▲

Rio Seco Falls, Trinidad ▼

Waterfall hunting

T&T's numerous **waterfalls** are another great reason to leave the beach behind. Tobago boasts a couple of lovely cascades, but Trinidad holds the best selection – and all of them offer the chance of a cooling dip in crystal-clear water. Some are buried deep into the corrugated folds of the Northern Range, while others are just a stroll from a road, but what makes them special is their pristine nature: undeveloped and surrounded by a lush canopy of chirping, steaming forest. Below is a list of some of the best cascades on the islands.

- **Argyll Falls** Tobago's best waterfall, with several tiers and some nice swimming pools, and just a short walk from the coast road to boot. See p.252
- **Avocat** One of Trinidad's most accessible falls, with a twelve-metre drop and a sizeable pool for swimming. See p.130
- **Guanapo Gorge** A stroll along a shallow river followed by walking and swimming through the cool confines of a thirty-metre-high gorge carved out of the granite with numerous little falls along the way. See p.144
- **Marianne River and Three Pools** A walk along the river culminates in three lovely waterfalls, one of which offers the opportunity to partake of a natural jacuzzi. See p.126
- **Paria** A couple of hours' walk along the coast from Blanchisseuse takes you to pristine Paria beach, with a pretty cascade just inland in which to wash off the salt. See p.128
- **Rincon** This gorgeous 76-metre-high waterfall inland from Las Cuevas beach is the highest in T&T, with a deep pool at its base. See p.124
- **Rio Seco** A forty-minute walk through stunning forest, Trinidad's most beautiful waterfall offers a deep emerald-green pool swathed by lush foliage. See p.149

colourful cocktails along with inexpensive pasta dishes and paninis. Closed Tues.

Mr D's Health Foods NIB Mall. Small and cheap café catering for vegetarians at the back of a shoe shop, with a daily changing menu including soy chunks, okra rice and energy drinks.

Rena's Chattack Roti Shop TLH Mall, Milford Rd. Tobago's best rotis are served here. Standard fillings such as channa, chicken or goat are always available, while more exotic ingredients like liver or conch are offered on Fridays.

Salsa Kitchen 8 Pump Mill Rd ☎639 1522. A lovely setting on a plant-wreathed veranda, best after dark when the fairy lights twinkle but also nice and shady at lunchtime. The fabulous tapas dishes are cooked to order and include dim-sum style steamed lobster dumplings, minted pork, kebab skewers with tamarind or peanut sauce and goat's cheese and mozzarella with onion and olive confit – perfect for sharing. There's also a daily special. Reasonably priced and popular; reservations essential for both lunch and dinner. Closed Mon.

Shutters on the Bay *Blue Haven Hotel*, Bacolet Bay, Bacolet ☎660 7400. Occupying a colonial-style villa overlooking Bacolet Beach, this expensive restaurant offers a sophisticated, romantic setting with an international menu that changes daily and always includes a fresh fish, meat and vegetarian option.

Tino's Wilson Rd, opposite *Royal Castle*. Large open-air bar decorated with colourful murals of the Buccoo goat races, Carnival and cricket players. Popular concert venue with plenty of space to dance. Expect a local clientele.

The leeward coast and Tobago Forest Reserve

Beyond Plymouth, the dramatic and sparsely populated **leeward coast** feels more wonderfully remote than any other part of the island; here, the claim that Tobago is not just paradise, but the capital of paradise, begins to ring true. Apart from at the lovely coastal village of **Castara**, tourist development has been virtually nonexistent, with the ravishing beaches at **Englishman's Bay**, **Parlatuvier** and **Bloody Bay** much the same as they were decades ago. Locals still make a living off the land and sea: clusters of bobbing pirogues in every bay and seine nets drying in the sun reveal the importance of **fishing** to this area, and you'll often see machete-wielding fellows trudging the route to small-scale plantations or meandering along with a pack of hunting dogs.

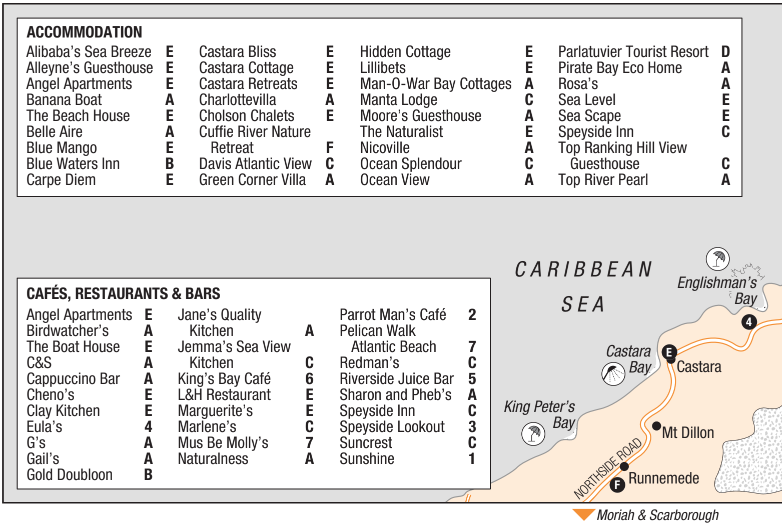
Inland of Castara and Bloody Bay, the area is dominated by the steep and lush terrain of the stunning, protected **Tobago Forest Reserve**, traversed by the Roxborough–Parlatuvier Road, which connects the leeward and windward coasts. Although even the most confirmed city-dweller should have no trouble negotiating the managed trails cutting through the thick and impenetrable-looking rainforest, any in-depth exploration of its ancient interior requires an experienced guide.

Although you might assume the most direct way to the leeward coast would be the coast road from Plymouth, this is actually the slowest route, due to its twists and turns; a better (if less scenic) bet is to take the Northside Road up from Scarborough.

This part of the island is among the least travelled by public transport. **Buses** from Scarborough run to L'Anse Fourmi a few times a day (see p.207), but **maxis** and **route taxis** often only go as far as Mason Hall or Moriah, so be prepared for vehicle changes and longer waits than elsewhere on the island. It's far more convenient to explore the area by **renting a car**.

The Northside Road to Castara

Less than a kilometre east of Scarborough on the Claude Noel Highway, the well-signposted **Northside Road** strikes right across the middle of Tobago and connects the windward with the leeward coast. Barely 50m along it, the right-hand turn by



ACCOMMODATION

Alibaba's Sea Breeze	E
Alleyne's Guesthouse	E
Angel Apartments	E
Banana Boat	A
The Beach House	E
Belle Aire	A
Blue Mango	E
Blue Waters Inn	B
Carpe Diem	E
Castara Bliss	E
Castara Cottage	E
Castara Retreats	E
Charlottevilla	A
Cholson Chalets	E
Cuffie River Nature Retreat	F
Davis Atlantic View	C
Green Corner Villa	A
Hidden Cottage	E
Lillibets	E
Man-O-War Bay Cottages	A
Manta Lodge	C
Moore's Guesthouse	A
The Naturalist	E
Nicoville	A
Ocean Splendour	C
Ocean View	A
Parlatuvier Tourist Resort	D
Pirate Bay Eco Home	A
Rosa's	A
Sea Level	E
Sea Scape	E
Speyside Inn	C
Top Ranking Hill View Guesthouse	C
Top River Pearl	A

CAFÉS, RESTAURANTS & BARS

Angel Apartments	E
Birdwatcher's	A
The Boat House	E
C&S	A
Cappuccino Bar	A
Cheno's	E
Clay Kitchen	E
Eula's	4
G's	A
Gail's	A
Gold Doubloon	B
Jane's Quality Kitchen	A
Jemma's Sea View Kitchen	C
King's Bay Café	6
L&H Restaurant	E
Marguerite's	E
Marlene's	C
Mus Be Molly's	7
Naturalness	A
Parrot Man's Café	2
Pelican Walk Atlantic Beach	7
Redman's	C
Riverside Juice Bar	5
Sharon and Pheb's	A
Speyside Inn	C
Speyside Lookout	3
Suncrest	C
Sunshine	1

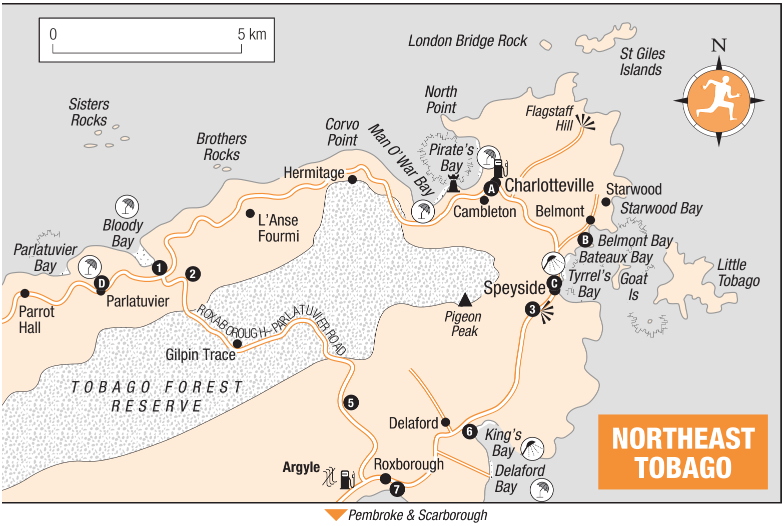
the bridge takes you up a narrow, near-perpendicular road to **French Fort**, the site of a Gallic garrison in the 1780s. It's now home to several towering radio transmitters and satellite pylons and the only hint of its history is a plaque nestled in the trees. The journey up to the fort is definitely worthwhile, though, for its panoramic **views** of Scarborough, Fort King George, Rockly Bay and Lowlands, the northern coast around Plymouth and Arnos Vale, and the southeast as far as Granby Point. Past French Fort turn-off, the Northside Road swings past the armed guards and clipped hedges flanking the **President's House** (closed to the public), and continues its snaking climb uphill, passing through the quiet village of **Cinnamon Hill**.

About halfway between the coasts lies the residential community of **Mason Hall**. The village itself contains little to detain you, but the marvellous **waterfall** hidden on the village's outskirts is worth seeking out. To find it, look for the roadside WASA sign for the Craig Hall water intake. Half an hour's walk from the road along the Sandy River will bring you to **Craig Hall Falls**, one of the island's tallest at about 50m. Taking the Craig Hall route leads you to the top of the main cascade, where there's another, smaller waterfall with a pool deep enough to jump into without touching the bottom. If you want to go with a guide, contact Darren Henry (see p.208) who leads hikes to the falls.

Continuing north, the road begins its winding ascent to **Moriah**, a very picturesque village teetering at the top of a steep precipice which plummets straight into a valley from the road. The views from here are superlative, with terraces on the surrounding hills supporting crops of pigeon peas and ground provisions, and Baptist prayer flags fluttering in the breeze.

A downhill turn-off to the left as you leave Moriah leads to **King Peter's Bay**, a seldom-visited but beautiful yellow-sand beach named after a Carib cacique. If you strike west from the beach into the bush over the next bluff you'll find an even more beautiful strip, with a good reef to boot. Check on the **security** situation before visiting King Peter's Bay, as robberies have occurred; equally, as the access road gets rough, you're best off walking the last stretch.

Past the King Peter's Bay turn-off, Northside Road heads for the coast, providing breathtaking views as you pass through the tiny community of **Runnemede**. Look out for a truly monumental **silk cotton** tree at the roadside; its buttressed


0
5 km
London Bridge Rock
St Giles Islands
N
Sisters Rocks
North Point
Flagstaff Hill
Brothers Rocks
Corvo Point
Man O' War Bay
Pirate's Bay
Hermitage
Charlotteville
Starwood
Starwood Bay
Cambleton
Belmont
L'Anse Fourmi
Bloody Bay
Belmont Bay
Bateaux Bay
Little Tobago
Parlatuvier Bay
Tyrrel's Bay
Goat Is
Speyside
Parrot Hall
Parlatuvier
Pigeon Peak
ROXABOROUGH–PARLATUVIER ROAD
Gilpin Trace
TOBAGO FOREST RESERVE
Delaford
King's Bay
Delaford Bay
Argyle
Roxborough
NORTHEAST TOBAGO
Pembroke & Scarborough
A
B
C
D
1
2
3
5
6
7

roots are said to be haunted by jumbies (ghosts). For one of the best vistas around, turn right at the fork just after Runnemede to **Mount Dillon**, where benches are set up to admire the unravelling coastline and, on a clear day, the island of Grenada. There's also a small takeaway snack shop and a souvenir stall.

Practicalities

If you fancy **staying** in the area, you'll find a peaceful hideaway at *Cuffie River Nature Retreat* in Runnemede (Ⓣ660 0505, Ⓕ660 0606, in US Ⓣ508/823-1190, Ⓦwww.cuffie-river.com; ⑥, breakfast included), where the large, airy and comfortable en-suite rooms are nestled into the forest on the site of an old sugar plantation; **tours** and **hikes** of the surrounding forest are offered to guests and non-guests. The swimming pool, elevated a metre above the forest floor, is the perfect place from which to enjoy the nature.

Cuffie River is also the best place to **eat** in the area, its atmospheric restaurant serving delicious, nutritious meals and home-baked bread at reasonable prices, freshly prepared with local ingredients as you look out over the forest from the veranda. Otherwise, a few low-key roadside shops selling roti and simple local dishes are dotted along Northside Road, although a more enticing selection of restaurants is on offer in Castara (see p.247). *Mason Hall Recreational Club* in Mason Hall and the brightly coloured *Randy's Night Light Saloon* in Moriah are good spots for a **drink**, albeit in occasionally raucous company.

Castara and around

As the Northside Road makes its final steep descent into **CASTARA** it passes a small layby – a perfect place to stop and admire the postcard-perfect view of the bay and village, all framed by the lush green tips of the rainforest. Castara is a picturesque, easy-going fishing village, with terrific **beaches** and laidback vibe that have made it increasingly popular with visitors; today, it's the busiest "resort" on this coastline, though don't expect anything as packaged and touristy as Crown Point. Although the number of guesthouses has grown exponentially in recent years, Castara's remote location has so far saved it from being eaten up by resort

▲ Liming on Castara beach

hotels, and there's an appealingly harmonious balance between visitors and locals. Fishing remains the main earner, and the beach is one of the best places to participate in the pulling of a **seine net**, still in constant use by the posse of Rasta fishermen. The village abandons its languid air each August, when the beach is packed with revellers attending the **Castara Fishermen's Fete**, one of Tobago's biggest; the drinking, dancing, eating and swimming start at about midday and continue until well after dark.

Accommodation

Castara is the only village along this section of coast where you'll find a choice of **places to stay**, many of them in charming wooden cottages with lovely views. The options are divided between the hillside overlooking Big Bay, the access road between this and the smaller Little (or Heavenly) Bay, and Little Bay itself. Many of the newer places are owned by foreigners, notably from the UK, and rates are often quoted in pounds. The majority of rooms here include some kind of cooking facilities, and if you plan on making a lot of meals yourself, you'd be well advised to stock up on provisions in Crown Point, as the shops here sell only the most basic of items.

Alibaba's Sea Breeze Little Bay Ⓣ686 7957, Ⓦwww.alibaba-tours.com. Four en-suite apartments occupying the best location in Little Bay: close to the beach and with immaculate views of Castara Bay. All suites have private balconies, well-equipped kitchens, fans and mosquito nets over the bamboo four-poster beds. The friendly owners are a great source of information and also run one of Tobago's most professional tour operators. ③

Angel Apartments Little Bay Ⓣ639 5291 or 784 5148, in UK Ⓣ0871 2880 123, Ⓦwww.angel-apartments.com. This austere concrete block a few metres from the beach is a bit of an eyesore, but the en-suite apartments with a/c, living area, kitchen and TV are very spacious, and there's a swimming pool (the only one in the village). Second- and third-floor apartments have verandas with sea views, and there's a breakfast bar (see p.247). ③

The Beach House Little Bay Ⓣ660 7702, Ⓦwww.tobagobeachhouse.com. Cute little wood-built house with a one-bedroom apartment upstairs and two studios downstairs (which can interconnect), set almost on the sands of Little Bay. All have appealing decor, nets over the beds, full kitchens, hammocks and a balcony overlooking the water, and the rates are very reasonable. ③/④

Blue Mango Second Bay Rd Ⓣ635 1570 or 768 0007, Ⓦwww.blue-mango.com. Castara old-timer; the three Sweet Point apartments have great bay views, cool breezes, well-equipped kitchens, fans, mosquito nets and plenty of privacy, while "Sea Steps" cottage has indoor and outdoor shower and a sundeck overhanging your own private cove, from where you can watch dolphins, and there's also a concrete cottage back on the road. Rooms are showing their age a little, however. Wi-fi available and restaurant on site. ⑤–⑦

Carpe Diem Castara Village Ⓣ639 3135, in UK 01932 848831, Ⓦwww.castara.net. Two fresh and airy apartments below the owner's gorgeous wood-built home, set on the hill and affording lovely views over both the bays. Equipped with netted bed, fan, full kitchen and large bathrooms, the spotless rooms downstairs are nicely styled and very inviting, while the self-contained two-bedroom apartment upstairs, with its huge veranda, is rented when the owners aren't in residence.③/⑦

Castara Bliss Castara Village Ⓣ352 5727, Ⓔcastarabliss@ymail.com. Set back from the main road in a lofty position overlooking the football field and the sea, these self-contained studio apartments have standing fans, kitchenettes, nets over the beds, balcony, hot and cold water and cool sea breezes. Friendly, helpful owner, too. ③

Castara Cottage Second Bay Rd Ⓣ757 1044, in UK Ⓣ07525 724 201, Ⓦwww.castaracottage.com. Beautiful wooden house split into three separate self-contained apartments, lovingly decorated and with many personal touches courtesy of the owners, and each with kitchen, mosquito nets, safe and private patio. Plants and trees surround the property, giving it a secluded feel despite being only a two-minute walk from the beach, and the Tamarind cottage in particular is great for kids. ③–④

Castara Retreats Northside Rd Ⓣ766 3656 or in US 1-613/267 5167, Ⓦwww.castararetreats.com. Ranged across the hill just to the south of the village, and with gorgeous views over the beaches, these airy wooden cottages with private porches and sundecks are thoughtfully designed, with spacious modern kitchens and bedrooms that allow you to see the sea from between the sheets. The lovely gardens see plenty of birdlife, and the staff are welcoming and efficient. ⑤–⑧

Hidden Cottage Castara Village Ⓣ686 5449, in UK Ⓣ0141 561 7518, Ⓦwww.hiddencottagetobago.com. Choose between a modern three-bedroom house or an apartment, both with a/c, kitchen and satellite TV, a short distance inland from the centre of Castara. There's also a jacuzzi in the attractive, bird-filled gardens. ③–④

Lillibets Little Bay Ⓣ760 6357, Ⓦwww.lillibets.co.uk. Perched high above Little Bay and accessible via a steep wooden staircase behind *Angel Apartments* (so not suitable for the disabled), these four suites come with a separate living area, cable TV, a/c, full kitchen, mosquito nets and private bathroom. The views from this elevated spot are excellent, enjoyed from a communal balcony with hanging chairs and bird feeders. ③

The Naturalist Castara Village Ⓣ639 5901, Ⓦwww.naturalist-tobago.com. Right on the beach, tucked into the corner of Big Bay at the bottom of the road between the two bays, with some lovely all-wood rooms upstairs with full kitchen, a/c, fan and TV; the standard rooms downstairs a little older. Wi-fi available and there's a restaurant on site. The name refers to nature-lovers rather than potential nudists; "no nudity" was added to the roadside advertisements after guests got the wrong idea. ③

Sea Level Second Bay Rd Ⓣ660 7311 or 731 5808, Ⓦwww.tobago.de. Just up the hill from the *Naturalist*, but still close to the beach, this guest-house is a good budget choice. Rooms are a bit dingy but offer good value and a modest degree of comfort; all have kitchen, balcony, mosquito nets and fan. ②

Sea Scape Little Bay Ⓣ1-559-287-9270 (in US), Ⓦwww.seascapetobago.com. Handsome wooden building perched high above Little Bay and reachable via steep steps, with two luxurious apartments that offer fabulous views from the balconies and bedrooms. Both are beautifully appointed with lavish kitchen, netted beds and safe; the larger apartment is split level, with one of its two en-suite bedrooms upstairs. ⑤–⑦

The village and beaches

Straddling the Northside Road, the main body of the village consists of a post office and a few weather-beaten rum shops interspersed with homes. A bridge on the eastern side of town crosses the **Castara River**; a ten-minute walk southeast along the riverbed brings you to a small **waterfall** with a fairly deep swimming pool below. Crossing the playing field behind the bridge cuts the walking time, and the pool is popular among local lads cooling off after a game of football; these frenetic, foul-filled tournaments take place in the late afternoon, and often attract a small crowd of spectators.

The main focus of the town, though, is its **beaches** – indeed, the stretches of sand here are among the best on the island. The main beach, known locally as **Big Bay**, is a generous swathe of coarse, shell- and pebble-strewn sand divided by the fast-flowing Castara River. If there hasn't been rain, the water is a joy – crystal clear and relatively calm owing to the protection of the surrounding forested headlands – but during the rainy season it turns a murky brown. Flotillas of seagull-infested pirogues bob out to sea, and there's always activity around the Fishermen's Co-Op building, where the day's catch is weighed, scaled and sold. Unfortunately for visitors with sensitive noses, changing facilities (daylight hours; TT$1) are directly opposite the Fishermen's Co-Op.

There is another, smaller beach to the east of Big Bay, known officially as Heavenly Bay, but referred to locally as **Little Bay**, which is quieter than Big Bay despite the profusion of guesthouses that now overlook the sand. The waters are often calmer than at Big Bay, and there's excellent **snorkelling** to be had on the reef that stretches around the headland from here; expect to see stingrays and perhaps the odd turtle. To get here from Big Bay, head out of the village, passing the turn-off for *Castara Cottage* and taking the next left, Depot Road (note that at the time of writing the poorly paved road was a bit hairy to drive down). If you're walking, look for the small track linking Second Bay and Depot roads just before *Blue Mango*. There are no changing facilities at Little Bay, although there is a lively beach bar/restaurant, while the staff at *Angel Apartments* will often allow non-guests to use their pool.

One of Tobago's best **tour operators**, Alibaba Tours (see p.208), is based in Castara. Of the other enterprising locals who take visitors on tours, reliable operators include the ever-pleasant Derrick Lopez, aka Porridge (Ⓣ766 3656 or 660 7702), who does pretty much any island tour you can think of and offers **car** and **cell phone rental** too. David Williams, also known as "King David" (Ⓣ660 7906 or 351 6552, Ⓦwww.kingdavidtobago.com), offers snorkelling, fishing trips, sunset cruises and barbecues from his sun-roofed boat, as does the excellent Loady from Soca Adventure Tours (Ⓣ732 4910), whose trips are a little cheaper. Duck's Tours (Ⓣ660 7785) also offer fishing and snorkelling tours and organize beach barbecues. For **internet** access, the quickest connection is at *Café Delight*, adjacent to the *Naturalist* hotel; there's also the Big Fish craft shop on the road out of town past the Little Bay turn-off. You'll find an **ATM** at the First Citizens Bank on a ridge above the main road as you exit the village to the north.

Eating and drinking

There may not be a huge amount of choice when it comes to **eating** in Castara, but there are several places offering excellent and inexpensive local cooking (usually rice with fish, chicken or goat, plus sides of peas and veg); and the fish is, of course, always supremely fresh. Local women bake wonderful fresh bread and coconut pastries in the clay oven behind *Cascreole* restaurant on Big Bay beach each Thursday and Saturday; order ahead, as supplies run out fast. Note also that *Cascreole* (Ⓣ639 5291) was closed at the time of writing following storm damage, but when reopened it's a worthy spot for lunch, dinner or a drink, set on a raised terrace overlooking the water.

As for entertainment, the village rum shops are great places for a **drink** and a chat with the locals, while *The Boat House* becomes the focal point of the village on Wednesday nights, when tourists and locals gather for a convivial beachside lime, with dinner and rum punch costing TT$200; steel pan starts at 7pm, and at around 9.30pm there's African drumming followed by a limbo competition. Other entertainment options are the *Naturalist*'s Sunday beach barbecue (7–10pm), with drumming and fish, chicken or pork, plus unlimited rum punch, for TT$125; and there are also occasional party nights at other locals restaurants and bars – just ask around.

Restaurants

Angel Apartments Little Bay. A good breakfast option if you're staying in Little Bay and can't face the walk to *Cheno's*, with a breakfast bar on the decked area around the pool, local and American breakfasts and bread baked in a clay oven.

The Boat House Little Bay ⓣ483 0964. Colourful English-run restaurant whose daily changing lunch and dinner menu usually includes local dishes plus burgers, chicken and fish, and pizzas on Sundays. Good for a drink overlooking the water, too. Closed Sat.

Clay Kitchen *Blue Mango Hotel* (see p.245). Reliable, mid-priced local breakfasts, lunches and dinners served on a recently refurbished terrace overlooking the Heavenly Bay valley.

Cheno's Main Rd ⓣ704 7819. This friendly diner, with tables in a little courtyard off the main road as you enter Castara from the south, is the village's best breakfast spot. Saltfish or eggs and bacon with coconut bake are excellent; they also serve coffee, cakes and reasonably priced local dinners of fish, chicken and crab, and have the odd party night.

L&H Restaurant Big Bay. Set on a lofty patio behind the Fishermen's Co-Op and very popular with locals, serving excellent and extremely inexpensive Tobagonian lunches, usually revolving around fish with rice, peas or provisions. Beers and soft drinks are available from the shop below.

Marguerite's Main Rd ⓣ710 6645. Across the street from *Cheno's*, with tables in an open-sided dining room, and offering local cooking with a bit of a twist (the chef worked overseas for a while); expect shrimp, fish, goat and chicken cooked with unusual veg combinations. Home-made pizza is also available by order. No alcohol licence, but you can bring your own.

Englishman's Bay to Bloody Bay

East of Castara, houses, shops and most of the traffic melt away, and the Northside Road is flanked by enormous tufts of whispering, creaking bamboo, broken occasionally to reveal marvellous jungle-clad hilly prospects. The next worthy beach, about 3km along the Northside Road, is **Englishman's Bay**, hidden from the road by a thick cover of bush; look out for the blue and white sign marking a left-hand turn and the gravel track which leads to the beach's small car park. Utterly ravishing and virtually undeveloped, the bay offers a perfect crescent of pure yellow sand, deep blue water and offshore reef – from the sea, the forested hillside appears completely untouched, as the bush drips right down to the sand. The bay remains delightfully remote, the quintessential "deserted beach" destination of many a pleasure boat cruise. For this reason, there have unfortunately been a few thefts from tourists at Englishman's Bay; see the crime and safety box on p.204 for some general advice when visiting Tobago's more isolated beaches. Hot meals including roti, chicken, fish and lobster are on offer, as well as ice cream, soft drinks and a nice selection of crafts, at *Eula's Café by the Sea* (ⓣ639 6408), which also serves dinner by reservation. There are no lifeguards here, but beach chairs can be rented from *Eula's*.

The coast road climbs upward and inland beyond Englishman's Bay, passing through the diminutive community of **Parrot Hall** after about 3km before descending to reveal one of the most arresting views on the island: **Parlatuvier Bay** is another crescent of pearly sand flanked by an absurdly pretty hillside scattered with palms, terraced provision grounds and the odd house. (You can get a great view over the village from the car park adjacent to the *Glasgow Bar*, on the left just south of Parlatuvier.) The pier in the middle of the bay is testament to the village's dedication to fishing, as are the gulls that roost on the rocks at either side of the bay, patiently awaiting the return of the boats. **Swimming** here is a vigorous experience as waves are usually quite strong and the water deepens sharply from the sand; be careful as there is no lifeguard on duty, and what with the fishing paraphernalia, it's not really a place to lay down a towel and sunbathe.

Built around the bay, the village of **Parlatuvier** consists of a few houses, a school and a handful of shops; the one presided over by local character Duran Chance

▲ Fishing boats at Parlatuvier

sells everything from floor wax to bread and rum. Above the shop, the excellent-value *Parlatuvier Tourist Resort* (☎639 5629; ②) has breezy apartments with fan or air conditioning, bathroom, kitchen and balcony overlooking the beach.

The last accessible beach on the coast – turn left at the T-junction signposted for the Forest reserve and Roxborough – is **Bloody Bay**, roughly 2km beyond Parlatuvier and named after a battle between English soldiers and African slaves in 1771 that was fierce enough to turn the sea crimson with blood; Dead Bay River, which runs across the sand and into the sea, is named for the same event. The beach itself is fine brown sand, strewn with pebbles and driftwood and frequented by no one except the odd fisherman. From here, directly opposite the bay and clearly visible 5km out to sea, the **Sisters Rocks** form an attractive cluster of tiny, verdant islands; it's also fun to explore the river which flows into the sea at the north end of the bay. For reasons best known to themselves, the Tobago House of Assembly have constructed a string of luridly painted buildings on the beach which, when fully open, will house changing facilities and a restaurant, and which detract hugely from the formerly unspoilt beauty of the place. Another option for a drink or inexpensive local lunch is the *Sunshine*, by the roadside just beyond the T-junction and a little before the Bloody Bay turn-off. With cold beers and tables under little gazebos, it's a lovely place for a stop.

Beyond Bloody Bay, the road continues to the lofty village of **L'Anse Fourmi**, a one-street town that's remote enough to make the sight of a tourist a talking point; there are a couple of **bars** in which to refresh yourself. Beyond here, it's trees rather than houses that line the smooth new coast road to Charlotteville (see p.258).

Tobago Forest Reserve

Swinging inland from the Northside Road at Bloody Bay, the Roxborough–Parlatuvier Road is the route to the **Tobago Forest Reserve** and the central mountain range. Construction of the road began in 1958, prior to which the two sides of the island were only linked by small trails. However, Hurricane Flora (see box below) ravaged it mercilessly five years later, and the road was not repaired until the mid-1990s. Now it's a beautifully quiet half-hour drive through the rainforest; lined with pioneer ferns and parrot apple trees, the tarmac is in generally good shape (though watch out for a few water-damaged spots) and traffic is rare.

The reserve itself acquired its status as the oldest protected rainforest in the western hemisphere during the plantation era, when British scientist Stephen Hales began researching the relationship between rainfall and trees and communicated his findings to Same Jenyns, a British MP responsible for the development of Tobago. At the time, plantations were concentrated in low-lying parts of the island, but the estates began encroaching on the more precipitous forest areas, felling trees for fuel or clearing land to make way for yet more sugar cane. It took Jenyns ten years to convince Tobago's planters that if they continued to cut down the forest, the island would soon be incapable of supporting the smallest of shrubs, let alone a massive sugar plantation. Ultimately, he was successful, and on April 13, 1776, 14,000 acres of central Tobago were designated a protected Crown Reserve.

The main point of access into the rainforest is the **Gilpin Trace**, marked by a painted sign 3km along the Roxborough–Parlatuvier Road. The 5km trail which strikes straight into the forest from here is well marked and maintained, though often very muddy regardless of the weather – the forest gets around 380cm of rain each year. You'll be offered rubber boots to rent for TT$20 on the approach to Gilpin Trace, and it's a good idea to take a pair (bring your own socks). The trail takes about two and a half hours to walk at a leisurely pace, taking you through some spectacular forest dotted with huge termite nests, with lianas and vines blocking out most of the light. The birdlife in the forest is most active early in the morning, so birdwatchers should aim to be on the trail by about 6am. Later in the day, you might see the odd hummingbird, mot-mot or woodpecker, if you're lucky. Typically, tour guides will take you past three small waterfalls – none are suitable for swimming – before turning back. If you follow the trail to its end, you'll come out of the forest just after the reserve boundary, towards the windward side, approximately 3km north of Roxborough – remember that it is a steep uphill walk along the road back to the start of the trail if you've parked there.

Hurricane Flora

On September 30, 1963, **Hurricane Flora** swept over Tobago and completely devastated the island. Most of the banana, coconut and cocoa plantations were wiped out, and large tracts of the forest reserve laid to waste, with 30-metre-high trees toppling like matchsticks. The catastrophic Flora killed thirty people, injured hundreds and razed to the ground sixty percent of the island's fragile board houses. Moriah, Concordia, Argyll and Richmond were completely demolished, roads were impassable and there was no mains water or electricity outside Scarborough for more than six weeks.

A **relief fund** helped to repair the worst of the damage, and the United Nations provided foodstuffs that fed the population for nearly a year, while other Caribbean islands pitched in, too. You can still see the effect of the hurricane in the forest reserve today, as there are few of the really huge trees that formerly made up the forest – much of those you see today are relatively small specimens that grew after Flora (or were saplings at the time). The hurricane also had a profound influence on Tobago's future; a tentative agricultural economy was abandoned, and the island began to devote its energy to tourism. Tobagonians still remember Flora with a shudder, but thankfully a similar event has not since occurred.

Rainforest guides

Training programmes have greatly increased the number of **knowledgeable guides** in the area, most of whom are from local villages such as Parlatuvier and Roxborough. All of them are also far cheaper than the hotel-arranged guides, charging about TT$240 per person for a two hour thirty-minute walk, or $160 for one hour thirty-minute trip. Reliable, certified guides include Dexter James (☎660 7852 or 7570761), who lives in the second house after the Northside Road/Parlatuvier–Roxborough Road junction, Junior Thomas (☎660 7847), Shurland James (☎660 7883 or 376 5908), Fitzroy Quamina (☎660 7836 or 344 1895) and Darlington Chance (☎660 7828 or 7823). Fitzroy Quamina also conducts full-moon nature hikes and an easy trek to Palm Tree Falls in Bloody Bay (TT$120). Another excellent guide is Alison Bascombe (☎660 6208) who runs rainforest, waterfall and birdwatching tours.

In addition to the local guides mentioned above, the box on p.208 lists other reputable guides who offer rainforest tours.

Tempting as it may be to walk through the forest alone, it's far better to hire a **guide**: you'll understand a lot more about forest dynamics, guides can point out things you may otherwise miss, such as bachac ants carrying their leaf shreds back to the nest, and you won't lose your way. If you do decide to walk alone, remember that the sun sets quickly on the island, resulting in a rapid drop in temperature and the increased possibility of getting lost. Since this is an isolated spot, you should also be mindful of the **security** risks of walking alone in the forest. During daylight hours, registered guides (usually ex-foresters) wait at the entrance to Gilpin Trace (registered individuals all have an ID badge), and you can also visit as part of a longer tour – see the box on p.208 for more on tour companies, and the one above for recommended forest guides.

There are no options for **refreshments** on the forest road itself, though just before entering the rainforest, the colourful *Parrot Man's Bird's Nest Café* has lovely home-made ice cream. On the other side of the forest as the Roxborough–Parlatuvier Road enters Roxborough you'll find the 🏃 *Riverside Fruits & Fruit Juice Bar*, a green-and-white painted stall by the roadside which serves excellent juices made with fresh fruits and coconut water while you wait, best drunk on the adjoining terrace overlooking the river; the bananas sold here are some of the sweetest on the island.

The windward coast

Rugged and continually breathtaking, Tobago's southern shoreline is usually referred to as the **windward coast**. It's spanned by the narrow, winding Windward Road, which sticks close to the sea and provides fantastic views of choppy Atlantic waters and tiny spray-shrouded islands. The parade of languid coastal villages here is a complete contrast to the more developed southwest, and though there is the odd guesthouse on or around the main road, this isn't the most enticing area in which to stay – tides and strong undercurrents make some of the most attractive-looking **beaches** unsuitable for swimming, and where they're not, the brownish water can be a bit off-putting (swimmers should note that from around April to August the poisonous Portuguese man-of-war is present in Atlantic waters). Nonetheless, the coastline between Scarborough and the King's Bay, where the road swings inland on its way to Speyside (covered on p.254) does make for a fantastically scenic drive, with plenty of roadside bars and diners in which to stop off and have a beer or some lunch and one or two diverting attractions, including the island's best **waterfall** at Argyll and the nearby **Tobago Cocoa Estate**.

Mount St George to Granby Point

The first stretch of highway ends abruptly a couple of kilometres east of Scarborough, just after the Dwight Yorke football stadium, named after the Tobago-born soccer hero who made his name playing with Britain's Manchester United. The last fast and straight section of road then sweeps past the glorious **Hillsborough Bay** (also known as **Hope Bay**) about 2km later; although the long stretch of windswept sand looks inviting, stick to paddling and enjoying the breeze – the riptides are dangerous. Past the beach and over a narrow bridge, the road swings round a sharp corner and into tiny **Mount St George**, on the eastern side of this large bay, its roadside houses with attractive flowered gardens. There's no discernible sign that this was once Georgetown, the island's first British **capital**, named in honour of King George III. The British began to develop Georgetown after they captured the island in 1762, building houses and a base (now destroyed) for the House of Assembly, which held its inaugural meeting here in April 1768. British occupation was short-lived, however; by 1769, they shifted the capital to Scarborough. There's still one tenuous connection to sovereignty in the town, though – set at the top of a breezy hillock overlooking the village below is the official residence of the prime minister, a seldom-used, whitewashed structure that's closed to the public.

Just beyond Mount St George, you'll pass Studley Park Quarry on your left, a busy commercial enterprise that's steadily eating into the surrounding hillsides. Beyond the unassuming village of **Studley Park**, home to Tobago's municipal dump, a right-hand turn onto a short gravel track leads to the sea at **Granby Point**. The track ends at a car park where you'll find a small children's **playground**. A flight of concrete steps leads off the car park and through some rather fly-infested bush to **Fort Granby**, originally built on Granby Point by the British in around 1765 to protect Georgetown and briefly occupied by the French between 1781 and 1787. Nothing remains of the original fortification; the cannons are long gone, replaced by pretty gazebos, mown lawns and picnic tables. The views of the sea and nearby **Smith's Island** are fantastic, and there is excellent swimming to be had on either of the **beaches** which flank the point. **Barbados Bay** to the right is the more populated; the fishermen's shacks on the sand make it a good spot to hang out, while the more deserted **Pinfold Bay** on the other side is a better bet if you fancy sunbathing; neither has any facilities, however, and both are only accessible from Granby Point. Drinks and meals are available from the *Dan's Country Kitchen* near the car park, while the genial roadside *Little Sparrow's Restaurant* in Mount St George is the ideal spot for an inexpensive and tasty **lunch** of roti and cold beer.

Goodwood to Pembroke

As the Windward Road swings into the tiny village of **GOODWOOD**, with its appealing gingerbread houses and neat playing field, you'll begin to see the views for which the windward coast is famous – starting with a spectacular panorama of the unravelling coast and distant **Richmond Island**. On entering the village proper a large sign on the left-hand side directs you to **Genesis Nature Park & Art Gallery** (Mon–Sat 9.30am–6pm; US$5; ☎660 4668), where a variety of animals, including capuchin monkeys, a boa constrictor, cocricos – the national bird of Tobago – and wild hogs (in small cages) are housed on the pretty landscaped grounds. The entrance fee includes a tour of the park and the not-as-interesting art gallery, which exhibits sculptures and paintings by the owner. There's a track leading from the centre of Goodwood down to the **beach**; the palm trees and greyish sand are nothing to shout about, but it's nevertheless a pleasant place for a swim, and popular with locals.

A few kilometres up the road in **Goldsborough**, a small village with a pretty cricket pitch by the sea, is the signposted left turn to **Rainbow Falls**, a series of privately managed cascades along the Goldsborough River for which the landowners at *Rainbow Nature Resort* (Ⓣ660 4755, Ⓦwww.rainbownatureresort.com; ⑤) charge TT$30 to enter; the resort has a restaurant serving drinks, and food if ordered ahead.

As the houses of Goodwood recede, the road climbs into **Pembroke** proper, yet another Lilliputian-sized village which spreads down to the sea from the road. It's a friendly place with a smattering of rum bars and a pretty clapboard Anglican church set on cliffs overlooking the Atlantic. As the road dips down again, there's a right-hand turn to the **beach**, which is mostly dedicated to fishing, but nice enough for a swim. Pembroke is the venue for the annual **Salaka Feast** celebrations, now an important part of the Heritage Festival (see p.37). A kind of African thanksgiving to the ancestors, the feast commemorates the community's founding by the first slaves brought to the area, and honours obeah spirits through dancing, singing, storytelling, drumming and offerings of fruit and other foods, followed by plenty of eating and drinking. At the time of writing, the **Pembroke Heritage Park** was under construction at the corner of the turn-off to Rainbow Falls. Once complete, its traditional-style buildings will house exhibits on Tobago heritage.

Argyll Waterfall and around

A narrow bridge not far up the Windward Road marks your entry to **Glamorgan**, a little bigger than neighbouring Pembroke and beautifully located atop its own hillock. Just out of town, the road widens, dipping down and up again through a small valley, the perfect spot to overtake any slow-moving vehicles in front of you. On the other side of the valley is the signposted left turn for **Richmond Great House**. Built of solid brick and whitewashed board in the eighteenth century, it was the estate house of the old Richmond sugar plantation. In more recent times it operated as a hotel and art gallery, but is now closed to the public.

Beyond the house, the Windward Road passes the Richmond water works on the right before returning to the coast at the tiny village of **Belle Garden**. Another few kilometres further along Carapuse Bay will take you to the entrance road to the much-visited **Argyll Waterfall** (daily 9am–5.30pm, last tour at 4pm; TT$40 adults, TT$20 children; Ⓣ660 4154, Ⓦwww.argylewaterfall.com). Here you'll find the clapboard booth of the Roxborough Estate Visitor Service Co-Operative (who manage the falls), where you must pay the entrance fee; there is also an internet café and soft drinks and snacks for sale.

To **access the falls**, follow the easily passable cocoa-tree-lined path to a grassy parking lot. Official guides wearing blue, green or yellow Argyll Falls shirts will be waiting here to take you to the falls (the guide's services are included in the entrance fee, although a tip is expected), giving a brief history of the Roxborough Estate and pointing out birds and flowers on the way.

The falls themselves are a pleasant fifteen-minute walk from the car park, and you can hear the water long before you reach it. Argyll is the island's highest waterfall, tumbling 54m out of the greenery into a deep pool. Even though it is also one of Tobago's most accessible cascades, to see the best parts you'll have to exert yourself a little and climb up the right-hand side along steep and sometimes bushy paths. There are three main waterfalls; the second is particularly strong – increased flow during the rainy season (June–Nov) creates a constant fine mist that soon soaks you to the skin. The second tier is great for a dip in a natural jacuzzi, as there are plenty of rocky seats on which to perch and get a pounding shoulder massage. If you're feeling energetic, climb up even further to the deepest swimming pool – and the smallest section of waterfall – where you can dive or swing in Tarzan-style on a vine. If the climb doesn't appeal, drive right up to the highest swimming spot.

From the Windward Road, the access road to the falls meets a T-junction; right is to the falls, while the left-hand turning winds a pretty but potholed route up into the hills and to the gates of the **Tobago Cocoa Estate** (Mon–Fri 9–11am; TT$60; ☎390 1229, Ⓦwww.tobagococoa.com), a working cocoa plantation overlooking a gorgeous valley with views down to the Atlantic. Lasting an hour or so, tours of the estate take in the groves of Trinidad Select Hybrid or "fine" cocoa, and the fermentation and drying process of the cocoa beans, as well as covering the history of cocoa production in Tobago via some historical displays. In 2009, the estate produced its first chocolate bar, a first for Tobago, and the owners take their chocolate seriously – the bars contain only single-estate cocoa grown here, and are made in France in small batches. Between December and May, you can pre-book whole day here (groups of 8 or more only; US$185 per person), which include a picnic lunch and a Creole dinner, and end with a chocolate- and rum-tasting session. Bars of chocolate are, of course, available to buy at the end of all tours.

Roxborough to King's Bay

The **ROXBOROUGH** environs are **cocoa** country; just before you enter town on the main road, 100m past the Argyll Falls turn-off, a left fork cuts straight through the old Roxborough Estate, one of Tobago's largest plantations and home of the only working cocoa house remaining from the colonial era in the Caribbean. Cocoa is a declining industry these days, as local youth turn away from agriculture in favour of the easy money to be made in tourism. The cocoa estate road swings back to the Windward Road at the western outskirts of town, roughly opposite the expansive fire station and community centre, and near the inland **Roxborough–Parlatuvier Road**, the route north through the forest reserve and to the Caribbean coast.

Roxborough is the largest town along this section of the coast. Its main drag runs parallel to the sea, although – unlike almost everywhere else on the windward parade – there are also a few residential streets stretching inland. The few small shops (and petrol station – the only one on this coast) are interspersed with plenty of dilapidated and abandoned buildings, giving the town a rather run-down appearance. It's a laidback and peaceful place, however, although that hasn't always been the case. In the hard times that followed emancipation, Roxborough was the scene of the infamous and bloody **Belmanna Riots** (see box, p.254), a rebellion that was to have a far-reaching effect on Tobago's system of governance. Apart from filling up your petrol tank or your belly (try the *Pelican Walk Atlantic Beach* restaurant for local meals or *Mus Be Molly's* for takeaway pies and cakes), there's no real reason to linger; the rubbish-strewn **beach** is nothing special and beyond a few low-key rum bars there's little to do. There is, however, an **ATM** in Roxborough, on the sea side of the road about mid-way through the village.

Turning inland past Roxborough – as you leave the town, you can get a good overview of some local blooms and fruit trees at Louis D'Or Nursery (open daily, daylight hours; free) – the Windward Road swings through the hilltop village of **Delaford**, making one almighty bend at the outskirts to reveal a breathtaking

The Belmanna uprising

Disgusted with the low pay and abysmal working conditions which dogged the ailing sugar industry after emancipation, African plantation workers from the Roxborough Estate **rebelled** in 1876, burning down the estate manager's home and rioting in the streets; in the ensuing melee, one of their comrades, a female labourer called Ti Piggy, was killed by police. Enraged, the workers surrounded the police station and demanded that the chief officer, **Constable Belmanna** – whom they held responsible for the death – should come out and confront them. Unwisely, he did; the mob descended, mutilating his body and beating him to death. As the unrest continued, the workers' ranks swelled with sympathizers from surrounding villages. Hopelessly outnumbered, the police could do little but retreat and call for external assistance; it came a week later in the form of a British warship, which transported hundreds of the dissenters to Scarborough, where they were slammed into jail and put on trial, most receiving a life sentence or banishment from the island.

The riot left self-governed Tobago in turmoil. Feeling they had completely lost control of the island and its predominantly black population, and fearing total chaos, the Legislative Council swiftly washed their hands of the whole affair and handed the running of Tobago back to the British. On January 1, 1877, Tobago became a **crown colony**, but the Belmanna repercussions were not to be quelled so easily. Continual unrest that followed throughout the island contributed to the final collapse of the sugar industry and the overall economic decline which led to the official coupling of Trinidad and Tobago in 1879.

view of the spiky coconut plantation surrounding the beautiful, deep blue **King's Bay** below. The **beach** here (daylight hours; free) is one of the few along the windward coast to provide changing facilities (TT$1 to enter) – as you leave Delaford, turn right at the blue and white sign. With gentle waters, reefs and fine dark sand, King's Bay is one of the best beaches in the area, but it's mostly favoured by fishermen, and is a great place to watch – and participate in – the pulling in of a seine net. There are also six attractive gazebos on a strip of grass next to the beach which make good spots for picnicking. The profusion of Carib Indian artefacts found here (on display at the Tobago Museum – see p.239) indicate that King's Bay was once the site of a large settlement; some suggest that the bay is named after Carib cacique (chief) King Peter, though it's more likely that that honour goes to King Peter's Bay on the Caribbean coast (see p.242).

There are no refreshments available at the beach, but just south of the sands and overlooking the bay on the main Windward Road, the well signposted *King's Bay Café* (☎771 2716; open from noon daily) is a good bet for home-made burgers and grilled meats, plus good brownies, too; the tables out the back have gorgeous views over the water.

Speyside

The coast disappears from view as the road turns inland beyond King's Bay (look out for the attractive old cocoa processing buildings on the left), and through hills and green valleys lush with huge stands of bamboo. Constant hairpin bends and a steep incline make the going pretty treacherous, so if you're driving, don't let your surroundings become too much of a distraction. However, it's hard not to get sidetracked by the amazing view which opens up as you round the last corner before the descent into **SPEYSIDE**, the last sizeable village on the windward coast. From the bench-dotted **lookout** point, you get a marvellous panorama of the town, the turquoise reef-studded waters of **Tyrrel's Bay** and the stunning sight of **Little Tobago** and **Goat Island**, the former a bird sanctuary that has long been a magnet for ornithologists and amateur birdwatchers alike. There's good forest hiking to be had along Murchiston Trace, a tiny road that strikes off to the right from the Windward Road just before the Speyside lookout; ask in Speyside for a local guide.

With a thin slip of grey-sand beach, Speyside is not as pretty as nearby Charlotteville (see p.258). Despite its emergence as a **scuba-diving** paradise and the easy accessibility of nearby reefs for some of the best **snorkelling** on the island, Speyside is a soporific kind of a place with a very end-of-the-road feel. The smattering of hotels seem to only ever have a couple of guests, with most of the activity confined to the dive shops and the tour buses that stop off at lunchtime to disgorge visitors at ever-popular *Jemma's*.

Accommodation

With three **hotels** and a number of guesthouses, finding accommodation in Speyside shouldn't be a problem, even in high season. However, unless you're here for the diving or ensconce yourself at *Blue Waters Inn*, Charlotteville (just ten minutes' drive away on the Caribbean coast) makes a much more pleasant base.

Blue Waters Inn Bateaux Bay ⓣ660 4341, ⓦwww.bluewatersinn.com. Speyside's largest and grandest hotel, set around stunning Bateaux Bay and separated from the village by a steep road. All rooms are spacious and luxurious, with rattan furniture, batik decor, a/c, porch/balcony and a sea view; choose from a standard unit or 1- and 2-bedroom self-catering rooms and bungalows. There's a restaurant, bar, dive shop and tennis court as well as 46 acres of lush tropical grounds with two nature trails. Use of kayaks, and sun-tanning beds are all free. ⑨

Davis Atlantic View Main Rd ⓣ660 4231. Diagonally opposite *Jemma's* and a good budget option within walking distance of the town's restaurants and dive shops, this guesthouse has four basic and clean rooms in two separate units, with each unit sharing a kitchen and TV area. Rooms have a/c and hot water in the private bathrooms. ③

Manta Lodge Main Rd ⓣ660 5268, ⓦwww.mantalodge.com. One of the town's larger hotels, with its own pool and restaurant and a dive shop on site. The rooms are decent, with a/c and coffee-makers, but the place has a rather forsaken air and the service can be indifferent. Rates include breakfast. ⑤

Ocean Splendour Top Hill St, off Main Rd ⓣ660 5293 or 787 0695. Set in the owner's home, which has lovely views over Speyside bay. The three rooms have a shared kitchen, TV area (with cable) and porch; each has a bathroom with hot and cold water, and one room has bunk beds. Meals are available. ②

Speyside Inn Main Rd ⓣ660 4852, ⓦwww.speysideinn.com. Simple and nicely styled with great bay views, this is much the better of the two hotels on the main road, with cabins and bungalows overlooking the pool (itself on a deck set back from the road), plus a new block of rooms facing the bay; all have balcony, fridge, safe and a/c or fan. There's a good restaurant on site (rates include breakfast) and the obligatory dive shop. ④–⑤

Top Ranking Hill View Guesthouse Top Hill St, off Main Rd ⓣ660 4904 or 682 3622, ⓦwww.toprankingtobago.com. Set in a huge pink house on the hillside above town, this is a great little place, with friendly owners who also operate one of the Speyside glass-bottom boats. The spotless and appealing rooms have kitchenette, fan, porch or balcony and en-suite bathroom with hot and cold water; some have a/c, too. Reasonable rates, free one-way beach shuttle, wi-fi, and car rental available. ③

The village

As the road descends into Speyside you'll see a large playing field to the right: this is a community focal point and scene of regular foul-filled football games. A small road running between the playing field and the sea takes you to the **beach** facilities (daylight hours; TT$1 to enter), though the skinny slip of sand isn't particularly inviting. The bay's famous **reefs** (see box, p.256) are within swimming distance, though, and it's also a good place to organize a **fishing** trip aboard a local pirogue; the fishermen will also be happy to take you to Little Tobago for around TT$100 per person, though if you're interested in birdwatching, it's probably better to go in more expert company (see p.208).

Carrying on along the main road brings you into the centre of Speyside, which comprises a bar and a tiny grocery opposite an esplanade where a gazebo provides a shady spot for local youths to mooch around. Past the next corner is what could loosely be termed the tourist strip, containing several shops, hotels and restaurants, including the famous *Jemma's* – built around a tree overlooking the sea. *Jemma's* also sells local flavoured coffee and food products.

Just past *Manta Lodge* hotel, the road forks; left takes you across the island's interior and on to Charlotteville (see p.258), while the right turn is the route to the astonishingly blue waters and rich reefs of **Bateaux Bay**, site of the luxurious *Blue Waters Inn*. At the start of the road, just past the bridge over the river (home to a family of very fancy ducks), you can explore the ruins of a coral-stone building and colonial-era waterwheel both being slowly overtaken by the foliage. There are a couple of benches under the almond trees at the seas edge here, and following the rocky path up the small hillock opposite the ruins brings you to a nice lookout point with a couple more benches. North of *Blue Waters*, the coast is almost completely uninhabited. The road to picturesque **Belmont** and **Starwood** bays is often impassable by car; you can walk it, but bear in mind that swimming at both is dangerous because of strong currents.

Little Tobago and Goat Island

Of the two misshapen islets sitting 5km or so out in Tyrrel's Bay, **Goat Island** is the closer. The white house nestled in its centre was built as the Tobagonian holiday home of Caribbean devotee Ian Fleming, author of the James Bond novels, who once owned the island. Both house and island are privately owned and closed to the public. However, birdwatchers and hikers flock to the larger **Little Tobago**, a kilometre further out to sea.

The most easterly point of the T&T republic, the two-square kilometre outcrop has been known as "Bird of Paradise Island" since the beginning of the twentieth century, when it was bought by keen ornithologist Sir William Ingram. In 1909 he transported 24 **greater birds of paradise** (*Paradisaea apoda*) from Aru island in New Guinea. Over the years, however, the birds were slowly extinguished by hurricanes and hunters. When Sir William died in 1924, his heirs gave Little Tobago back to the government on condition that it receive protected status. It has remained a bird sanctuary ever since, uninhabited except for one of the Caribbean's largest seabird

Exploring Speyside's reefs

Speyside's main attractions are the amazingly rich coral reefs spread across Tyrrel's Bay. The village's **dive shops** are listed in the scuba diving box on p.216, which also lists more details on what Speyside's reefs have to offer. Extra Divers and Aquamarine Dive are the most professional, safety conscious outfits. Both operators rent **snorkel** equipment for around US$10 per day.

Glass-bottom boats are a good way to see the reefs if you don't want to get wet, but also take you closer to the best snorkelling as well. The three boats are Frank's and Top Ranking (☎660 4904), both based at *Blue Waters Inn* (☎660 5438), and Fear Not (☎660 4654), based at *Jemma's*. All offer 2hr 30min trips including snorkelling and a stop at Little Tobago for US$25; you can also get shorter glass-bottom tours of the reef for a little less.

colonies, which includes impressive flocks of frigate birds, boobies, terns and the spectacular red-billed tropic bird. You'll also hear the crows and clucks of feral cocks and chickens brought here by the now-departed resident caretaker, who was unable to round up his private flock before leaving the island.

Several trails cut during the island's brief spell as a cotton plantation mean there are good possibilities for **hiking**, though as Little Tobago is only 1.5km long at its widest point, these are hardly marathon treks. Make sure you have enough drinking water with you, however, as no refreshments are available. All the boats dock at a small beach facing the mainland, from where you get beautiful views of Speyside and Pigeon Peak above, one of Tobago's highest points at 576m. At the beach there's a wooden shelter with toilets, benches, tables and a list of dos and don'ts for visitors: no smoking, no fires and so on. Concrete steps lead up the hillside, passing the ramshackle caretaker's house, long-deserted but still displaying framed posters of Little Tobago's most common bird species. Well-signposted trails lead off from here through the dry and scrubby landscape; head for the cliffside nesting grounds of the red-billed tropic bird, where a lookout point provides sweeping views and an opportunity to see birds up close.

To get the most from the island, hire an experienced guide, such as David Rooks (Ⓣ631 1630, Ⓦwww.rookstobago.com), the man who persuaded David Attenborough that Little Tobago was sufficiently unique to be included in his seminal 1990s documentary *Trials of Life*. For other recommendations for guides, see the box on organized tours, p.208.

Eating and drinking

Speyside isn't exactly a metropolis, even during the high season, and in the low season, you'll find the town pretty much deserted as some of the cafés and dive operators close up shop. Nonetheless there are a couple of good local **restaurants**, as well as some more upmarket choices in the hotels.

Birdwatcher's Main Rd. Brightly painted café at the sea's edge with an indoor and a more pleasant outdoor eating area overlooking the water. Friendly staff serve all the usual staples of chicken, fish and Creole dishes, although there are usually only one or two choices on any given day. Good food at good prices, and both lunch and dinner available.

Gold Doubloon *Blue Waters Inn* Ⓣ660 4341. Designed with package tourists in mind, the food here is overpriced, running from fish broth to fish in coconut sauce, pork chops and pan-fried chicken; breakfast is also available. The setting is pleasant though, decorated with fishing ephemera and with windows overlooking Bateaux Bay, perhaps better enjoyed over a cocktail than a meal.

Jemma's Sea View Kitchen Main Rd Ⓣ660 4066. Popular with every island tour bus, with dining areas on several levels built around the boughs of a tree, and offering fantastic sea views and ocean breezes. The Creole food is reliably tasty and pretty reasonably priced: breakfast (Sun–Thurs 8am–8pm, Fri 8am–4pm) is eggs, bacon or local fish dishes, while lunch and dinner menus include grilled, curried or stewed fish, baked chicken in a mushroom or barbecue sauce, plus shrimp and lobster and sides of breadfruit pie, tanya fritters or aubergine casserole.

Marlene's Main Rd. On the right-hand side as you enter Speyside, this white shack serves great roti, though it's only intermittently open.

Redman's Main Rd. This basic restaurant in the pink building next door to *Jemma's* has a lovely sea-facing terrace decorated with conch shells, and serves tasty and simple local dishes – think chicken and rice or fish with pigeon peas, macaroni pie and veg – at low prices.

Speyside Inn Main Rd Ⓣ660 4852. With tables on a covered patio overlooking the sea, this in-hotel restaurant is well worth a try, and is often the busiest spot in Speyside after dark (though that's not saying much). The reasonably priced daily changing menu might feature roast duck breast in a mango sauce, mahi mahi with tamarind sauce or kingfish cooked with coconut, and breakfast is also available.

Speyside Lookout Windward Rd Ⓣ660 6092. In a fantastic position with the panoramic views of the bay unfolding below, this is a scenic spot in which to drink a cappuccino or a natural juice and browse the selection of craft. A restaurant was under construction at the time of writing, serving a menu of local dishes.

Suncrest Main Rd Ⓣ660 6027. Popular with locals, especially at night, this lively bar blasts out soca and reggae from its dark interior.

Charlotteville and around

Beyond Speyside, the Windward Road strikes inland on its way from the Atlantic to the Caribbean coast, climbing steeply upwards through the island's central spike before plummeting down to the opposite shoreline. Tobago's most easterly portion of tarmac marks the last sign of "civilization"; northeast of here, the countryside is completely undeveloped, with no electricity or piped water for the hardy handful of small-scale farmers, bush hunters and fishermen who live here. Just before the descent to the Caribbean, there's a signposted turn-off for **Flagstaff Hill**, with the freshly tarmaced road sweeping past some very fancy homes. At the crest of the hill, the road opens up to reveal a wide grassy area dotted with benches and overlooked by a lofty communications tower and mobile phone mast. The wind whistles through the metal and the views are absolutely superlative: Tyrell's Bay, with Little Tobago and Goat Island to one side, and to the other, Man O' War Bay, Booby Island, Cambleton Battery and, much further out, Sister's Rocks. This excellent vantage point was once used by British and French soldiers, who used mirrors to warn their colleagues stationed at Cambleton Battery below of an approaching ship.

As the Windward Road begins its seaward plunge, the absurdly pretty fishing town of **CHARLOTTEVILLE** comes into view; houses tumble willy-nilly down a hillside met by calm Caribbean waters, while frigate birds swoop overhead fishing boats and yachts bob in the bay. Snugly situated under the protective cover of two-kilometre-wide **Man O' War Bay**, Charlotteville is one of Tobago's foremost fishing communities – more than sixty percent of the island's total catch is brought in by local fishermen. Bordered on each side by steep forested hills, the town has an isolated feel, although this is in fact one of Tobago's biggest communities with around 5000 inhabitants. It is also one of its oldest, first settled by Caribs and then by the Dutch in 1633 – for many years the bay was known as Jan De Moor Bay after an early Frisian occupant. During the plantation era, the area was divided into two successful estates, Pirate's Bay and Charlotteville; sugar shipments made regular departures from the bay, and the town prospered. In 1865, both estates were purchased by the Turpin family, who still own much of the surrounding land. Today, tourism plays its part – albeit as second fiddle to fishing – in sustaining the local economy, and the town is increasingly popular with independent types who come for the quiet beaches and laidback charm.

Accommodation

The generous quota of **guesthouses** in Charlotteville – several of the friendliest ones concentrated at the eastern end of town near the track to Pirate's Bay – is usually enough to cope with demand. The period from December to April can get quite busy, so it's wise to book ahead if visiting at this time.

Note that the *Banana Boat* hotel (Ⓣ660 6176, Ⓦwww.banana-boat-tobago.com), in a fine location on the beach west of town, was undergoing renovations at the time of writing; call or check the website for an update.

Alleyne's Guesthouse Belle Aire St Ⓣ660 4423. Three pleasant rooms, simply decorated, with fan, shared toilet, shower and kitchen. One of the cheapest guesthouses in town and close to the excellent beach at Pirate's Bay. ②

▲ Fishing from Charlotteville pier

Belle Aire Belle Aire St ☎660 5984. Just before the Pirate's Bay track, these four basic, white-painted rooms have fan, mosquito nets, en-suite bathroom and fridge. All except one have porches and there is a shared kitchen and dining room. The small garden has a barbecue pit and a gazebo for picnics. ②

Charlottevilla Northside Rd, Cambleton ☎639 6331 or 304 6542, Ⓦwww.travel-tobago.net. A handsome two-storey building opposite the road to the beach facilities on the outskirts of town, with two one-bedroom apartments on the ground floor and a two-bedroom unit taking up the top floor, with its wraparound veranda. All have fans, kitchen, lovely wooden furnishings and en-suite bathrooms. ③

Cholson Chalets Man O' War Bay ☎639 8553, Ⓦwww.cholsonchalets.com. The most atmospheric option in town, set in beautifully maintained old green and white houses overlooking the beach at the Pirate's Bay end of town. The six simple apartments have a deliciously antiquated feel with their muslin curtains, wooden floors and furniture passed down through the owner's family; those on the top floor are the nicest. All have fans, private bathroom, kitchenette and cable TV. Advance booking is recommended. ②–④

Green Corner Villa 82 Bay St, opposite the Pirate's Bay Track, ☎739 6917. This basic but friendly guesthouse next door to *Gail's* is a great budget option. The two small, clean and cosy rooms, one en suite, one overlooking the sea, with mosquito nets and fans. Shared kitchen. ①–②

Man-O-War Bay Cottages Man O' War Bay ☎660 4327, Ⓦwww.man-o-warbaycottages.com. Situated right next to the beach in tree-shaded gardens, the cottages are different shapes and sizes, with one to three bedrooms. All have fan, bathroom, hot water and kitchen, but are in need of some sprucing up. There's also a small commissary on site. ③

Moore's Guesthouse Belle Aire St ☎660 4749. Opposite *Belle Aire Inn* and accessed via a steep staircase, *Moore's* has the best views of all the guesthouses located in this part of town. Of the four large, basic rooms, two are en suite, and there's a shared kitchen, lounge with plastic-covered sofa and simple bathroom. ②

Nicoville Spring St ☎639 8553, Ⓦwww.cholsonchalets.com. In a good location just behind *Cholson Chalets* and managed by the same owners, the studio and one- and two-bedroom apartments here are decently priced. All have standing fans, hot and cold water and kitchenette, and those at the top overlook the playing field. ②–③

Ocean View 11 Mission Rd ☎660 4891, Ⓦwww.oceanview-tobago.com. These small, spotless apartments done in typical Tobagonian decor are perched on Charlotteville's hillside, with lovely views over Man O' War Bay from the balcony. Each has a/c, en-suite bathroom and fully equipped kitchen. ③

Pirate Bay Eco Home Pirate's Bay ☎767 4666 or 333 7470, Ⓦtobagoecohome.com. At the top of a steep path above the Pirate's Bay track, with no access for vehicles, twenty minutes' from the village, this inexpensive option has four two-bedroom apartments set among fruit gardens. All are spacious, rustic and clean, with kitchen, hot and cold water, fans and mosquito screens. ③

Rosa's Ⓣ660 5984. At the start of the track to Pirate's Bay and in a lovely spot right on the water, these to basic apartments have kitchen, netted beds and hot and cold water, as well as a decent-sized porch. ②

Top River Pearl 32–34 Spring St Ⓣ660 6011 or 354 7427, Ⓦwww.topriver.com. Set away from Charlotteville's main seafront area, these airy, well maintained en-suite apartments have kitchenettes, balconies and ceiling fans (a/c available for an additional charge), and a large communal sundeck complete with hammocks and views of the bay; the downstairs cappuccino bar (see p.262) is a pleasant place to hang out. ③

The Town

If you're seeking peace, quiet and great beaches, it's hard not to become utterly besotted with Charlotteville. The hole-in-the-wall shops and sprinkling of restaurants that make up the town centre line the road along the beach, while the streets that stretch inland and uphill from are mostly residential. There's little to actually do but enjoy the sea, whether you arrange a **fishing** trip aboard the many pirogues which moor up in the bay, or just while away the hours on the fine yellow sand of **Man O' War Bay Beach** – site of Tobago's most popular fisherman's fete, held to celebrate St Peter's Day. The best stretch of sand in Man O' War Bay is five minutes' walk west of the town centre, where you'll find changing/shower facilities (daylight hours; TT$1) as well as a beach bar and restaurant. The bay itself is clean, calm and inviting, with good snorkelling.

Back in the centre, the focal point is the **Fishermen's Co-Operative** building, with its blackboard displaying the day's catch alongside messages to its members. Benches along the sea wall, the fishing pier and a covered pavilion are popular liming spots, great for fishermen to dry their nets and anyone soaking up the village scene; the pier is also a lovely spot from which to watch the sun set.

Heading east from here, the coastal street turns inland, but a dirt track continues along the shoreline to the town's – and, for many, Tobago's – most attractive beach, **Pirate's Bay**. After walking for about ten minutes along the steep track you'll come to a long concrete stairway, at the bottom of which you're rewarded with a stunning horseshoe of calm emerald green water and fine yellow sand, with a backdrop of trees, ferns and foliage. A tumbledown fisherman's hut is the only building in sight, and there's even a freshwater rinse, courtesy of a stream trickling down from the hills. The bay's translucent waters offer fantastic **snorkelling**, especially on the left-hand side. The seventeenth-century buccaneers after whom it was named may have gone, but the bay still has its freebooters, a large colony of **frigate birds**, which feed by snatching recently caught fish from the beaks of smaller seabirds. These, and other birds such as terns and pelicans can be found at St Giles Island a few kilometres to the north, but strong currents make it difficult for small boats – and thus birdwatchers – to get there. If the walk (or the stairs) are too much for you, you can usually arrange for one of the village's fishermen to drop you at the beach and pick you up. Though the track is partially driveable, it's best to leave your car in town – the only place to park is also the only turning spot, so leaving your vehicle there means anyone else will have to reverse back down the hill.

Locally run Workshop Sea Tours, opposite *Sharon and Pheb's* restaurant (Ⓣ660 6281, Ⓦwww.workshopseatours.com), offer half-day fishing trips as well as offshore island **tours** and bird- and dolphin-watching expeditions; and Tobago Sea Kayak Experience (Ⓣ660 6186 or 474 7765, Ⓦwww.seakayaktobago.com) provide kayaking tours for both novices and more advanced paddlers. In terms

Bustin' the bamboo

In Charlotteville and other rural Tobago communities, music at open-air celebrations and Christmas/Old Year's festivities is often given an ear-splitting percussive accompaniment. Loved by small boys for the incredibly loud, cannon-like explosion that's produced, the tradition of "**bustin' the bamboo**" remains a popular – and highly dangerous – sport. To achieve the desired earth-shaking report, the prospective buster must have the know-how to first select a piece of bamboo of the correct age and durability with at least four or five internal joints, and then cut the section so that joints seal each end. A hole is pierced at one end, and the bamboo is filled with pitch oil (kerosene) from a slit at the opposite end. The fuel is lit and fanned until it heats up sufficiently to blow out the remaining joints, which creates the resounding boom and often results in the loss of eyelashes and moustaches.

of **practicalities**, there is a police station, health centre and branch of First Citizens bank (with an ATM) on the inland side of the playing field in the town centre, opposite the library. On the bay front, at the back of the car park adjacent to the pavilion, there's a small **tourist office** (Mon–Fri 8am–4.15pm) where you can get basic information on the town and its surrounds. Internet access is available at Workshop Sea Tours, which also has a **laundry** and sells tickets for the ferry to Trinidad. Next to the Fishermen's Co-op on the eastern side, Bay View Shopping Mart (Mon–Sat 8am–9pm, Sun 8am–3pm) houses the post office and offers a laundry service. To the west of the Co-op there is a petrol station (Mon–Sat 6am–8pm), next to which the **buses** from Scarborough stop (for timings, see p.207). When planning your return to Scarborough, count on the bus departing Charlotteville approximately an hour and a half after it leaves Scarborough, although it could be earlier or later – and it's advisable not to rely on catching the last bus of the day, which is infamous for not turning up at all.

Cambleton Battery

Reached via a steep and potholed lane striking off from the main road on the western outskirts of town, **Cambleton Battery** (no set hours; free) was built by the British in 1777, who placed two cannons here to defend against attack from marauding American warships; the sweeping views of Charlotteville, Booby Island and Pirate's Bay explain why they chose this site. It's now a popular cooling-off spot for locals, who lime away under the shade of the gazebo.

Accessed via the road linking Charlotteville with L'Anse Fourmi (see p.248), the next bay along, **Hermitage**, is attractively deserted with a shingle beach and plenty of washed up flotsam, although rip tides make swimming precarious.

Eating and drinking

Your best bet for **food shopping** is Bay View Shopping Mart, although it stocks only basic provisions; on the other hand, you can buy fresh fish daily from the Fishermen's Co-Operative. Charlotteville is not blessed with swanky **restaurants**, but there are plenty of places cooking up inexpensive and delicious local food, with fish particularly good. The bar at the beach facility on Man O'War Bay serves decent local lunches from Wednesday to Sunday, and is a nice drinking spot in the evenings, too; otherwise, *Sharon and Pheb's* is a nice spot for a drink, as are the few rum shops along Bay Street.

Cappuccino Bar *Top River Pearl* guesthouse, 32–34 Spring St. This is the place to come for your caffeine fix – excellent cappuccino (which feels like quite a feat in far-flung Charlotteville), as well as light meals and juices. Wi-fi available, too.

C&S Bay St. Almost opposite *Sharon and Pheb's*, and serving drinks, cakes and excellent home-made ice cream.

G's Bay St. Right on the roadside opposite *Sharon and Pheb's*, and with a covered terrace behind, overlooking the beach that makes a nice spot for a sunset rum and coke or beer from the adjoining bar. The Creole food – baked chicken, fish with all the trimmings, and fish and chips, is good and inexpensive.

Gail's Bay St. There's nothing fancy about the local cuisine offered for dinner here, but it's cheap, cheerful and well prepared, served on a little terrace overlooking the water just past the pier toward the Pirate's Bay track.

Jane's Quality Kitchen Bay St. Slap in the middle of Bay St with tables on a covered patio, the location is the draw here, but the fish and chicken lunches and dinners are inexpensive and pretty decent, and breakfast is sometimes available too.

Naturalness Bay St. Simple dishes such as roti are served alongside the beers and spirits at this hole-in-the-wall rum shop on the main street.

Sharon and Pheb's Bay St Ⓣ660 5717. This local institution is the most professional outfit in Charlotteville, always reliable and with good service. For breakfast, there's saltfish or fried with coconut bakes and cocoa tea, plus eggs, bacon and the like, while lunch and dinner rests on staples such as barbecue chicken and Creole fish, served with tasty sides (scallop potatoes, mixed veg and the like) on an attractive veranda raised a little above street level.

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History

Trinidad was the first Caribbean island with a human population, having been settled by Amerindians from South America as early as 5000 BC, who called their new home "Ieri", the land of the hummingbird. The early incomers were Arawaks – peaceful farmers and fishers – joined after 1000 AD by more warlike Carib tribes.

The Amerindians and European conquest

When **Christopher Columbus** "discovered" Trinidad in 1498, the Amerindian population of some 35,000 had created a structured society, with organized villages along the coastline presided over by chiefs, and a self-sufficient economy that exploited the abundant natural resources and extensive trade with the South American mainland. Sighting the three peaks of the Trinity Hills, Columbus named the island **Trinidad**, landing at Moruga on the south coast. Despite an initial skirmish with the local tribes, Columbus's sailors considered them the friendliest in the Caribbean islands. This didn't suit the Spanish **slave traders** who followed hot on Columbus's heels; despite protests from Spanish priests such as Bartolomeo de las Casas, they exaggerated the Caribs' occasional ritual **cannibalism** to justify enslaving them.

The first permanent **Spanish settlers** came to Trinidad in 1592, establishing the small town of San José – present-day St Joseph – complete with governor's residence, *cabildo* (council chamber) and church. Although this fledgling capital was sacked in 1595 by **Sir Walter Raleigh** as he headed for South America in search of El Dorado, it was quickly rebuilt, and the colony survived, despite its vulnerability to foreign attacks and pirate raids, growing tobacco and cocoa for export to Europe. In 1687, Capuchin monks arrived from Spain, setting up several **missions** around the island. Alongside the proselytizing, the missions were also a means to control the Amerindians through the *encomienda* labour system, a kind of semi-slavery in which they were forced to work on plantations and build more churches.

To evade this threat to their way of life, some Amerindians moved to the rainforested interior, while others fought back – in 1699, Amerindians in San Rafael rebelled against Spanish missionaries attempting to forcibly convert them and subject them to *encomienda*. Three priests and then-governor José de León y Echales were killed, and the reprisals were savage: Spanish troops slaughtered the region's entire Amerindian population in what's now known as the **Arena Massacre**. Amerindians were further threatened by European diseases to which they had no resistance, and by the end of the eighteenth century, some three hundred years after Columbus's arrival, the indigenous population had been all but wiped out.

Spanish Trinidad

Despite all the depredations they visited upon the Amerindians, the Spanish had neither the desire nor the resources to develop Trinidad, treating it as little more than a convenient watering-hole en route to the riches of South America. Their governors were left to do as they pleased – illegal trading of goods and slaves was commonplace – and due to its poor defences, the island suffered repeated attacks from French, Dutch and English **pirates**. When Don Pedro de la Moneda arrived from Spain to take up the governorship in 1757, he found his St Joseph residence practically in ruins, and decamped to Port of Spain.

Eventually, though, the Spanish realized that if they didn't develop this neglected colony, somebody else would. Issued in 1783, the **Cedula of Population** was designed to encourage fellow Catholics – **French planters** suffering Protestant discrimination in British Grenada and Martinique – to settle in Trinidad; the amount of land they were allocated depended on the number of slaves they brought with them. Immigrants of mixed European/African race (termed "**Free Coloured**" by the Spanish) who brought slaves could also receive land (though only half as much as their white counterparts), thus opening the way for the development of a property-owning middle class of non-whites, whose ancestors still run much of Trinidad's big business today.

To implement the Cedula, Spain despatched a new governor, **José Maria Chacon**, in 1784. The economy flourished under his energetic administration, and people of French and African descent came to dominate the population. The island's culture also became increasingly French: it was during this period that **Carnival** was introduced, the French language created a local patois, and a society based on aristocratic principles of birth and connections developed.

As the repercussions of the **French Revolution** gave rise to civil and international wars throughout the West Indies, many more French – both republicans and royalists, white and mixed-race – sought refuge in neutral Trinidad, but to Chacon's alarm, they brought their ideological conflicts with them. Increasingly anxious, the governor reported to Madrid that some of the newcomers' radical ideas were encouraging the slaves to "dream of liberty and equality".

The British conquest

Keen to augment their sizeable list of Caribbean colonies, the British seized upon the idea that Trinidad had become a nest of republicans and "bad people of all descriptions", despatching an invasion fleet under **Sir Ralph Abercromby** in 1797. The island had few defences: just five ships compared to the British force of eighteen, and only two thousand soldiers – many of whom had deserted – against seven thousand. The Spanish surrendered with hardly a shot fired, scuttling their own ships in Chaguaramas harbour, and Chacon was recalled to Spain in disgrace.

Abercromby's terms of defeat were lenient – residents could retain their property and Spanish law would remain in force – but his choice of governor, **Thomas Picton**, was less fortunate. Left in charge with near absolute powers, Picton instituted a reign of terror, deporting and executing suspected subversives (mostly slaves and freed coloureds) on the flimsiest evidence, with confessions frequently obtained under torture. Followers of African religious traditions were persecuted especially harshly; those suspected of practising **obeah** were hauled before a tribunal, and if found guilty were whipped, hanged, mutilated or burned to death. By 1802, Picton's activities had become an embarrassment to the British government, then facing an influential anti-slavery lobby at home, and he was demoted.

Trinidad presented a unique administrative conundrum for the British, however. Their other Caribbean possessions were governed by colonial assemblies, but this wasn't an option for Trinidad – any such body would inevitably be dominated by planters, who would never agree to share power with free coloureds, despite the fact that many of the latter were substantial property owners and thus difficult to

Obeah

A retention of African animist traditions, **obeah** (from the Ashanti *obayfoi*, meaning witchcraft or magic) is the belief in a spiritual power that can influence events in the temporal world, curing disease, providing good fortune or wreaking revenge. Though dismissed by most as mumbo-jumbo, obeah still lingers on in common superstitions and practices passes down over the generations. In rural areas, you'll often see **blue bottles** placed over front doors or in gardens to ward off the evil spirits known as jumbies (see p.137) or protect against the evil eye or **maljo** (*mal yeux*), and there are still those who enlist the services of an **obeah man** (or woman), also known as an **ojhaman** or **seer-man** in the Indian community, usually a respected figure dispensing herbal medicines rather than a sinister character cooking up bubbling potions under a full moon. During the plantation era, every slave community had a herbalist who doled out concoctions for all kinds of ailments, and elements of these traditions remain strong in Trinbagonian attitudes to health. As spiritual and physical problems are seen as being connected, practitioners might prescribe plants, herbs, roots and barks alongside shop-bought substances such as red lavender to be infused into the skin through a bush bath, said to get rid of "blight" or maljo or turn around a run of bad luck; or advise an internal cleanse and purge by way of a dose of cooling herbs such as wild senna, caraili, mauby or pawpaw bark, followed by a cleansing dose of aloes or castor oil. Less commonly (as such practices are illegal in Trinidad and Tobago), special circumstances such as a case of unrequited love or a feud, may see an obeah practitioner paid to invoke or dispel a curse, which is done through a ritual to bring on the desired effect – called "**working obeah**" – that is reversible only by a more powerful practitioner.

exclude from government under British law. The island therefore remained a **crown colony**, governed by French and Spanish law, with directions issued straight from the colonial office in London.

Emancipation, indentureship and immigration

Though life for the **slaves** on Trinidad and Tobago's estates was no less brutal than in any of the British colonies, the islands never developed into the full-blown plantation societies of Jamaica or Barbados. Rather than the massive estates established elsewhere, plantations in T&T were relatively small-scale, with just a handful of slaves rather than several thousand, and the British touted Trinidad as a "model" colony thanks to the introduction of a few tentative measures that attempted to curb the worst of the planters' abuses. Nonetheless, it was a miserable life for the Africans, who resisted by organizing secret societies with their own militias and carrying out several **rebellions**.

The British abolished the slave trade in 1807, though this meant nothing to the slaves still working T&T's estates; and even after the **Act of Emancipation** in 1834, freed slaves were required to serve as apprentices for a further six years. When the apprenticeship system was abolished in 1838, many former slaves moved to urban areas, leaving the planters desperately short of labour, and the British government sanctioned the immigration of **indentured labourers** from India as a means of easing the situation on the estates. In May 1845, the first 225 workers arrived aboard the *Fatel Rozack*; by 1917, when the indenture system ended, some 145,000 Indians, mainly from Calcutta, had come to T&T. Fleeing poverty and

African religions

Centred upon the acceptance of a synthesis between the spiritual and temporal worlds, and the belief in spirits or gods which organize and animate the material world, T&T's **African-based religions** combine Christianity with elements of traditional West African belief systems brought to the island by slaves. The most visible sect is the **Spiritual Baptist** faith, which was established in the late nineteenth century by American ex-slaves who had fought for the British in the War of 1812. Then known as **Shouter Baptists** thanks to their propensity for loud and demonstrative worship, the sect was frowned upon by the British, who banned membership through the Shouters Prohibition Ordinance of 1917. Years of campaigning finally saw the law repealed in 1951, an act that's commemorated in the **Shouter Baptist Liberation** national holiday on March 30.

A well-organized faith, Spiritual Baptists have **churches** throughout Trinidad and Tobago which, as well as the usual pews and altar, feature a **centre pole** decorated with flowers, jugs of water and candles to harness and attract the spirits. Services usually involve purification rituals designed to cast out jumbies (evil spirits) that might be lurking in the church: lighted candles are placed in front of doors and windows, incense is lit, brass bells are rung and perfumed water strewn about. Bible readings precede chants and handclapping, which intensify as a kind of hyperventilation known as **adoption** brings about **spirit possession**, accompanied by bell-ringing and chanting called trumpeting the spirit, the origin of the "shouter" tag. Those who "catch the power" may grunt, gesticulate, speak in tongues or relay the spirit's message in English or even Hindi. The characteristic white robes and colourful headwraps worn by followers (which signify their dedication to a particular saint or spirit) are a notable part of the Trinbago Sunday scenery, you may also see outdoor **baptisms**, where white-clad converts are ritually dipped into rivers or the sea.

A Yoruba religion driven underground during British rule, **Orisha** (also Orisa or Shango) remains a somewhat clandestine cult. The faith centres upon worship of several deities – orishas – who are seen to have a distinct influence upon the living and must therefore be (depending on the situation) respected, pacified, praised, worshipped or feared through ritual dances, chants, drumbeats, offerings and prayer. Each orisha's personality is described in stories that reveal their activities on earth, with each assigned an individual drumbeat, colour, day of the week, favourite food and liquor, sacrificial animal (usually a chicken or goat) and an association with a Christian saint; this last tradition allowed Orisha to be syncretized with Christian festivals when the faith was outlawed. Orisha worship takes place in a **palais**, usually an open-roofed structure decorated with the symbols of individual orishas – daggers, cutlasses, hammers, jugs of water and ritual items such as olive oil for anointing, and offerings of flowers, fruit and foods. Known as **feasts**, most ceremonies take place over several days, and begin with the specialized drum patterns that summon Ogun. Drumming, dancing, chanting and hyperventilation encourage possession of devotees by various orishas, while sacrifices may be performed to honour the spirits that descend.

the increasingly harsh British rule, the immigrants were signed up to work for five years in return for their passage home. (In 1854 the indenture was extended to ten years, and after 1895 the immigrants had to pay a proportion of their return passage.) Though indentureship was better regulated and monitored than slavery, the working and living conditions of labourers and slaves were practically indistinguishable. The Indians lived in unsanitary single-room barrack houses where disease was rife, and plantation owners failed to honour pledges on wages and working conditions.

Nonetheless, many stayed on at the end of their indentureship, accepting land in lieu of a passage home. Known then and today as "**East Indians**" to differentiate them from the "West Indians", they formed the lowest rung of society, working in the agricultural sector scorned by ex-slaves and establishing tight-knit communities that maintained the religious and cultural traditions of their homeland (much to the resentment of the African population, whose ancestors had been afforded no such indulgence). The white ruling class, however, painted the Indians as heathens and barbarians – in 1884, 22 Indians were shot dead by police and hundreds wounded as they tried to enter San Fernando during the annual Hosay festival parade, while East Indian children were considered illegitimate until 1945, as Muslim and Hindu marriages were not recognized. Despite their persecution, Indian immigrants contributed greatly to Trinidad's developing national identity. Just as the Europeans had brought Carnival, which was taken up and enriched by former slaves, Indians introduced their own festivities and culture. The Muslims introduced **Hosay**, the Hindus brought **Diwali**, and Indian food, such as roti and curry, became staples for all Trinbagonians.

T&T's ethnic mix was further enriched by immigrants from other parts of the world. Several companies of **black American soldiers** who fought for Britain in its 1812 war against the US were given grants of land in southern Trinidad, where they founded villages named after the units in which they had served while, after emancipation, freed slaves from other **Caribbean islands** were attracted to Trinidad by the relatively high wages for field labourers. **Africans** liberated by the British Navy on anti-slave patrols settled in urban areas, becoming craftsmen and construction workers and establishing strong communities that maintained their own cultural institutions and heritage. The first **Chinese immigrants** arrived in 1853 as part of another attempt by the government to meet the continuing labour shortage on the plantations. The plan failed on account of the high transport costs and an appalling mortality rate among the immigrants; those who survived tended to become shopkeepers, and their descendants constitute a small but visible minority today. **Portuguese** labourers were also brought to the country in the mid-1800s, but the practice was short-lived as the employment of Europeans in manual work was seen as a threat to the established racial hierarchy.

Except for a handful of **Jews** who arrived during World War II, the last group of immigrants to join Trinidad's melting pot were the **Syrians** who came in 1913, seeking refuge from religious persecution in the Lebanon. Though they only account for 0.1 percent of the country's population, their business acumen has given them a high profile, and they remain a tight-knit and influential community today.

Into the twentieth century

Trinidadian society remained deeply stratified along race and class lines for most of the nineteenth century, with white planters firmly at the top of the heap, but in the 1880s and 1890s, reform movements began to challenge the status quo. An improved national education system and an enlarged franchise inspired the formation of **political pressure groups** linked to the international labour movement, from the Trinidad Workingmen's Association (TWA) and East Indian National Association to the Pan African Association, which lobbied the British Colonial Office for an elected governing body for the island.

In 1899, Britain made ailing **Tobago** a ward of Trinidad, though the latter still had no effective form of self-government (for more on the history of Tobago, see p.204). Resentment came to a head over the introduction of new water rates, and in 1903 a protest meeting in Port of Spain's Woodford Square erupted into a **riot**. Eighteen people were shot dead by the police, and the Red House – seat of the colonial government – was burned to the ground. Although Britain finally agreed to an **elected assembly** for Trinidad and Tobago in 1913 (albeit one with very limited powers), it was still more than ten years before the first Legislative Council convened in the rebuilt Red House.

Trinidad's burgeoning **oil industry** and the aftermath of **World War I** further politicized the populace. High inflation led to strikes, resulting in increased cooperation between Africans and Indians, while fuel was added to the fire by Trinidadian soldiers who returned from the Great War with stories of discrimination at the hands of the British. The tide had finally turned, with socialism, national independence and the concept of black consciousness, as promoted by Jamaica's Marcus Garvey, now firmly planted in the public mind. In 1925, TWA president **Arthur Cipriani** was elected to the new legislative council, campaigning hard for workers' rights and securing some important concessions, including compensation for industrial injuries. His reformist politics had little effect on the underlying balance of power, however; wages were actually falling, malnutrition was widespread, living conditions grim and industrial accidents appallingly common. As the world economy nosedived into the **Great Depression** of the 1930s, Cipriani found himself outflanked by a new generation of radicals such as the charismatic **Uriah Butler** (see box, p.195), who formed the **British Empire Workers** trade union in 1935.

The road to independence

During World War II, Trinidad's socio-economic character was altered radically by the presence of the **US military**, who leased Chaguaramas, the Bocas islands and Waller Field in 1941 to provide a base for their Caribbean fleet. The Americans improved Trinidad's infrastructure and exposed the population to high-level technology for the first time, while the **high wages** they were paid for the construction of buildings and roads lured workers from the agricultural sector and led to the decline of many estates. The Americans' racial attitudes, cruder than the more subtle prejudice of the British, and the aura of easy money that attracted many Trinidadian women, caused plenty of resentment, however, and further increased the desire for independence. **Universal suffrage** was granted in 1945, and the 1946 and 1950 elections were won by political parties linked to the trade unions, but Britain was not prepared to hand over total control while radical labour politics dominated the political arena. In January 1956, a group of black intellectuals formed the **People's National Movement** (PNM) under the leadership of Oxford-educated historian **Dr Eric Williams**. The party's black nationalist policies and the charismatic leadership and immense intellectual authority of "the Doctor" gained widespread support among a population tired of colonial government and the divisions within the labour movement; their only serious opposition was from the **People's Democratic Party** (PDP), later the **Democratic Labour Party** (DLP) supported primarily by rural Hindus. After a controversial campaign that raised racial tension by portraying the DLP as reactionary Hindus, the PNM won a tentative victory in the 1956 election; they were to remain in power for the next thirty years, with Williams as prime minister until his death in 1981.

Many Caribbean leaders saw West Indian confederacy as the way forward for the region's tiny territories, and initially Williams was an enthusiastic proponent of the idea. In 1958, the **West Indies Federation** was launched at Chaguaramas, but political rivalries and the reluctance of larger islands to subsidize smaller ones resulted in a watered-down Federation with no tax-raising powers. When Jamaica voted to leave in September 1961, Williams announced that "one from ten leaves nought"; Trinidad followed suit, and the Federation was swiftly dissolved.

The early 1960s saw the PNM adopting a radical stance, booting out the US military in 1961 and campaigning vigorously for independence, while politics split further along racial lines, with government the preserve of Afro-Caribbeans, and opposition that of East Indians. After **Independence** was finally granted in 1962, things further degenerated when the PNM created a new constitution without consulting the DLP. Autonomy from the "motherland" had done little to change the colonial structure of T&T's society, and the electorate became increasingly disenchanted with their new-found "freedom".

Independent Trinidad

The late 1960s were marked by repeated unrest. The American **Black Power** movement caught the imagination of many disaffected Trinis, and in 1970 its supporters launched a wave of marches, protests and **wildcat strikes** that shook Trinidad to the core. Businesses and banks were bombed, and when the police shot dead a young protester named **Basil Davis** in April 1970, 30,000 people took to the streets for his funeral. Facing a possible general strike, Eric Williams declared a state of emergency and arrested several Black Power leaders, only to be faced by an **army mutiny** at the Teteron base in Chaguaramas, staged by officers outraged at government heavy-handedness. It was only quashed when coastguard vessels prevented the soldiers from marching on Port of Spain by shelling the main road; rumours abounded that a bloody coup had been averted and plans had been discovered for mass executions of "enemies of the people".

The crisis proved cathartic. Many whites had fled the country; those who remained could no longer expect the deference to which they had been accustomed, while the government encouraged locals to be trained for jobs previously occupied by expatriates. The country was teetering on the edge of bankruptcy, with the PNM remaining in office primarily thanks to divisions in the opposition. "We are winning by default," PNM minister Hector McLean observed dryly. But salvation was ahead in the form of **oil**. Just as the world was sliding into the oil crisis of 1974, vast reserves were discovered off the east coast, and T&T found itself swimming in money overnight. Ambitious public projects were undertaken and the country settled back to enjoy the boom years. But this sudden wealth had its downside. People got used to the easy life – productivity fell and agriculture dwindled, but corruption thrived.

When oil prices fell in the 1980s, the economy went into **recession**, unemployment rose sharply and inflation soared. In 1981, Williams died a disillusioned man with his policies in ruins; his former finance minister George Chambers took over the reins. As the population became increasingly dissatisfied, the opposition parties started to unify. In 1986, the PNM was ousted by the **National Alliance for Reconstruction** (NAR), led by A.N.R. Robinson, who had resigned from Williams' government in 1970 following the Basil Davis debacle. The NAR tried to resolve some of the more pressing problems facing the country, but within a year the government was breaking up into factions. Harsh economic measures, including **devaluation** of the TT dollar and a stringent IMF-inspired recovery programme, were widely seen as undemocratic and beneficial only to the rich. In 1990, the radical Muslim group **Jamaat-al-Muslimeen** (see p.74) attempted to overthrow the government, holding Robinson and several of his cabinet hostage. Though the coup was crushed after a six-day siege, the government's authority was irreparably undermined, and the following year the PNM returned to power under **Patrick Manning**.

Over the next five years, increased oil revenues during the Gulf War helped the PNM stabilize the economy and pay off the IMF, but the 1995 election split the country down the middle, with the PNM and the Indo-Trinidadian **United National Congress** (UNC) both winning seventeen seats. The two NAR representatives held the balance of power, and used it to support the UNC, making lawyer and former union leader **Basdeo Panday** the country's first East Indian prime minister. Although the 2000 election returned the UNC to power with nineteen seats, Panday's government lasted just ten months; in October 2001, three UNC MPs defected to the opposition, and with their majority removed, the UNC were forced to call an election. Another hung parliament ensued, with both the PNM and UNC returning 18 of the 36 total seats each. Though the UNC won more votes, President A.N.R. Robinson appointed Patrick Manning as leader, but with no clear mandate to govern Manning called another election and was decisively returned to office in October 2002.

In 2006, the political waters were muddied by the formation of a new party, the **Congress of the People** (COP). Fronted by former UNC leader **Winston Dookeran**, COP represented the first credible alternative to the two-party dominance of the UNC and PNM since the ill-fated NAR, and despite Dookeran's somewhat lacklustre leadership style, they took 22.72 percent of the vote in the 2007 elections – to the chagrin of the UNC, which copped 29.84 and asserted that as the PNM had managed only 46 percent of the total vote, COP had effectively split the opposition and allowed Patrick Manning another term in office. Though their share of the 2007 vote didn't translate to any seats in parliament, COP soldiered on nonetheless, scoring many points among Trinbagonians for distancing itself from the race-based voting of the past, where Indians traditionally sided with the UNC and Africans with the PNM. The UNC, meanwhile, was struggling under the increasingly erratic rein of Basdeo Panday, and internal elections in early 2010 saw **Kamla Persad-Bissessar** replace him as UNC leader, marking the end both of Panday's 33-year political career and of an era in Trinidadian politics. Patrick Manning, meanwhile, was coming under fire both for his increasingly dictatorial style of leadership and for the PNM's culpability in the UDeCOTT scandal (see opposite), and called an early election in May 2010, with detractors arguing that he was going to the polls only to avoid an imminent vote of no confidence. The opposition were finally able to unite under the banner of the People's Partnership, with Persad-Bissessar as their candidate for Prime Minister.

A **landslide victory** at the polls ensued, with the People's Partnership taking 29 seats and the PNM just twelve. Kamla Persad-Bissessar became the Republic's first female Prime Minister and immediately distanced the new coalition administration from the somewhat despotic ruling style of Manning's PNM, creating a Ministry of the People to allow public grievances to be aired and announcing a raft of policies that included an assault on poor environmental practices and a rethink of water resource management. However, despite an election campaign that championed zero tolerance on corruption, the People's Partnership came under fire early on thanks to a perceived conflict of interests concerning Jack Warner, appointed by Persad-Bissessar as Minster of Works and Transport despite holding the post of Vice-President of FIFA.

The PNM, meanwhile, were left in disarray. Vilified by his party for having lost the election thanks to controversial multi-million dollar projects as well as his links to the UdeCOTT scandal and alleged involvement in the construction of a TT$30 million church at Heights of Guanapo near Arima, Patrick Manning resigned as PNM leader and was replaced by his arch-rival, **Keith Rowley**, a controversial figure whose parliamentary questions led to the official probe into UDeCOTT.

Current issues

One of the most pressing problems in modern Trinidad and Tobago has been rising **crime**, particularly the kidnapping of high-profile businesspeople and the violent fallout from Trinidad's uneasy status as one of the Caribbean's main transhipment points for south American cocaine. Until the 1970s, T&T was virtually crime-free; today, it's a rather different picture. In 2000, 119 **murders** were reported; by 2009, the figure had shot up to 509, slightly down on the previous year's 550. The PNM government unleashed various initiatives, including a series of cripplingly expensive airships equipped with state-of-the-art surveillance gear that patrol the skies above (and waters around) Trinidad – though whether the **blimp**, as it's known, is more a very visible symbol of the fight against crime than a real deterrent remains a controversial issue. Certainly, crime remains one of the main challenges facing the People's Partnership administration.

Another matter of pressing concern for Mrs Persad Bissessar is **corruption**, with a series of court cases against politicians regularly hitting the headlines; even former UNC prime minister Basdeo Panday spent time behind bars in 2007, having been found guilty of not declaring a foreign bank account (a charge that was later quashed on appeal), while in March 2007 FIFA vice-President and UNC Jack Warner was fined nearly US$1 million by FIFA after he gave exclusive rights to sell 2006 World Cup tickets in T&T to a travel agency run by his son. The PNM government, too, were tainted by plenty of corruption allegations, most notably the scandal associated with the Urban Development Company of Trinidad and Tobago (**UDeCOTT**), a state-owned company established in 2004 to carry out building projects as part of the programme Vision 2020, which aimed to achieve developed nation status for T&T by 2020. The PNM pumped millions of dollars into ever-more lavish UDeCOTT projects, including Port of Spain's waterfront complex and the National Academy of the Performing Arts, but in March 2010 executive Chairman **Calder Hart** resigned after it was revealed that lucrative contracts had been given to a company owned by his wife's family. The entire board were fired the following month in the wake of a Commission of Enquiry report that pointed to irregularities in numerous projects, from the TT$700 million Brian Lara stadium in Tarouba to the TT$368 million Ministry of Legal Affairs tower in Port of Spain, built by CH Construction, a company with alleged links to Hart.

On a more positive note, Trinidad and Tobago continue to enjoy the status of having the most **stable economy** in the Caribbean thanks to The Republic's reserves of oil and natural gas, which account for around forty percent of GDP and eighty percent of exports, and which have provided something of a buffer from the global economic downturn; equally, T&T's external debt is relatively insignificant compared to other Caribbean nations. The income generated from oil and gas is increasingly being used to develop other sectors, including manufacturing, finance, services and tourism, though as reserves are being fast depleted – it's widely agreed that they'll be exhausted within twenty years – there is a real need to diversify the economy. And despite its natural riches, T&T remains a very polarized nation, where high-tech malls co-exist with board shacks where inhabitants live without electricity or running water. Whether Vision 2020 can truly be realized remains to be seen.

Carnival

Justifiably touted as the "greatest show on earth", Trinidad's **Carnival** has its origins in the Roman feast of Saturnalia, a midwinter celebration of birth, renewal and inversion of the norm. During the Middle Ages, it developed into the Feast of Fools, in which the pretensions of the Catholic Church were scabrously mocked and which the church did its best to suppress the festival. In the long run, however, assimilation proved more effective, and Carnival was incorporated into the Catholic faith as a final binge (carne vale or "farewell to flesh") before the fasting period of Lent.

A history of Trinidad carnival

Introduced by **French planters** in the late eighteenth century, Trinidad's Carnival was initially the preserve of the white Creole establishment. A comparatively decorous affair, it consisted of masked balls that allowed the gentry a brief fictive escape from the "cares" of power and respectability: the men would dress as "negres jardins" (field labourers), the women as "mulatresses", representing their slaves or their husbands' mulatto mistresses.

Carnival was also celebrated in semi-secret by slaves on the plantations; after **emancipation** in 1834, free Africans took their own Carnival procession onto the streets in bands, protected by groups of *batonniers* or stick men. Continuing the tradition of inversion, some costumes satirized the affectations and eccentricities of the French Creoles, with men dressing as **Dame Lorraines**, planters' wives with fancy gowns and exaggerated breasts and buttocks. Other characters – the little demon known as **jab jab** and the stilt-walking **moko jumbie** – drew on West African traditions and folklore. The parade was enlivened by the use of percussion instruments and the introduction of **canboulay**, which celebrated the end of the difficult and dangerous task of saving burning cane fields by parading through the streets with flaming flambeaux – the name is derived from the French *canes brulées*, or burning cane.

Disapproving of what they saw as the "desecration" of the Sabbath by the first day of Carnival, the British authorities decreed in 1843 that the festivities could not begin until Monday morning. Since no time was specified, carnivalgoers started celebrating on the stroke of midnight, and today's anarchic **Jouvert** parade was born. Many of the masquerades acted out in the street processions took the form of trenchant **satires** of the colonial government, and in 1846 the authorities attempted to prohibit the wearing of masks. Carnival found defenders in unexpected quarters, however: the French planters, keen to defend their own traditions in the face of increasing Anglicization; and the coloured middle class, whose desire for respectability kept them aloof from Carnival itself but who saw attempts to control it as an assertion of white domination.

Carnival continued to provide an outlet for irreverence and satire through the nineteenth century, with outrageous parodies of British **sailors** stationed on the island, as well as characters representing underworld archetypes: **jamettes** (prostitutes) and transvestite **pissenlets** (literally "wet-the-bed"). Bands organized **drumming** and **kalenda** (**stickfighting**), and none of it went down too well with the colonial administrators from Victorian Britain. In 1877, police chief **Captain Arthur Baker** began a campaign to tame Carnival, but when he attempted to ban the canboulay outright in 1881, the so-called **Canboulay Riots** broke out (commemorated today in a dawn reenactment on the Friday before Carnival). Undeterred, the authorities went on to prohibit what had become known as "jamet Carnival" on the grounds of its lewdness. African-style drumming was banned in 1884, while canboulay and stickfighting – seen respectively as a fire hazard and an incitement to violence – were outlawed a year later under the **Peace Preservation Act**.

Carnival was not so easily quashed, however, and continued in an albeit more sedate manner. Social protest was channelled into the emerging labour movement (see p.269), and Carnival became an officially tolerated safety valve for social pressures, with the black middle class joining in. During the 1890s, the festival became increasingly organized and socially acceptable with the introduction of a **competition** for best band, and in 1921, the calypsonian Chieftain Douglas opened the first organized **calypso tent** to preview the songs that would be heard in the forthcoming Carnival.

During **World War II**, Carnival was suspended by the colonial government as a possible threat to public order, and when it returned on VE Day 1945, it marched to the sound of a different beat – the **steel pan**, fashioned from oil drums brought to the island by the US military. As the national independence movement gained momentum, Carnival flourished alongside. Recognizing its importance to Trinidad's cultural identity and sense of nationhood, Eric Williams established the National Carnival Commission in 1957 to organize and promote the festivities, and set up the Calypso King competition. Though parades during the 1970s saw masquerade bands exploring topics such as racism and white control of the economy, and **Peter Minshall**'s fabulous presentations in the 1980s and 1990s took mas to a new creative level, Carnival today is more about fun than politics,

Ten commandments of playing mas

- Get to Trinidad in time to collect your costume early and make any necessary adjustments (you can buy supplies at the shops listed on p.103), and go to some fetes so you know all the year's big tunes before you hit the road.
- Cut your toenails very short to minimize damage from the pummelling they'll take, and wear quality, well-fitting, worn-in footwear and absorbent sports socks.
- If you're going to wear tights with your costume, get them early before shades and sizes run out, buy two pairs in case of snags, and cut the toes off to avoid damaging your nails. Micles in West Mall and Samaroos (see p.103) have a good selection.
- No matter what your skin colour, start Carnival Monday and Tuesday by dousing yourself in factor 50 sunblock. Take some with you, and re-apply it regularly. Aerosol sunblock is easier than cream.
- Build up stamina with some exercise before the main event; some of the larger mas bands organize pre-Carnival walks and runs.
- Bring a disposable camera rather than anything expensive, and get a cheap pair of sunglasses, too. Take souvenir pictures before you leave home when everything's looking fresh.
- Eat a good breakfast before setting out, don't skip lunch, and drink water throughout the day. Alternate alcoholic drinks with something soft.
- Prearrange how you'll be getting home on Carnival Monday and Tuesday – book a cab, or designate a driver. Try to find out where your band will be finishing to simplify pick ups.
- Everyone loosens up a bit come Carnival, but don't lose sight of your common sense. Stick with your friends, don't accept drinks from strangers, and if you can't find a toilet en route, don't head off alone down dark alleys.
- Smile for the cameras, wine, wave, chip and jump – it's Carnival!

satire or social inversion. "**Pretty mas**" bands of revellers decked out in identikit costumes of feathers and beads are now the order of the day, and given the high price tag and exclusive aura of the prevailing all-inclusive mas bands, many now argue that Carnival has turned full circle, with the parades the sole preserve of the rich. Equally, though costume construction has traditionally been highly specialized and skilled, the drive to cut costs means that most bikini mas isn't even made in T&T these days, instead being imported from the Far East. Nonetheless, designers such as Brian MacFarlane have brought out contemporary bands with a creative edge, and smaller outfits continue to create gorgeous sailor and fancy Indians mas, while the establishment of a Mas Academy in Woodbrook in 2009 should help to ensure that the unique skills of Trinidad's mas-makers are continued into future generations.

Carnival today

To the eye of an uneducated onlooker, the two explosive days of Carnival might appear a chaotic spectacle, but underpinning the whole event is an order and structure that is the culmination of exhaustive preparations. The countdown begins in late summer, when the large mas bands hold **launches** for their Carnival designs. Once Christmas is out of the way, things get serious. The big steel bands open up their yards for visitors to watch practice sessions, calypsonians perform their Carnival compositions in the "tents" in Port of Spain and around the country, and each week features a bewildering choice of pre-Carnival fetes.

On the Saturday before Carnival weekend, the parades kick off with the **Red Cross Children's Carnival**, with kids displaying their costumes at the Savannah; the following day, there's a children's parade along Western Main Road in St James. Come the next weekend, "Fantasic Friday" sees a re-creation of the **Canboulay Riots** at 5am in downtown Port of Spain, and the **Soca Monarch** competition in the evening, while the next day there's another **Children's Carnival** parade from South Quay to the Savannah, which makes way for the **Panorama** finals later that day. On Sunday evening, the **Dimanche Gras** competition includes the crowning of the **King and Queen of the Bands** and the all-important **Calypso Monarch**. Carnival then officially starts at 4am on the Monday morning with **Jouvert**, or dirty mass, when participants dress in macabre or satirical home-made costumes, or join a mud band and smear themselves with mud, grease, body paint or liquid chocolate before taking to the streets in an anarchical expression of Carnival's darker side. This wild party lasts into the daylight hours of Monday, and even if you're not playing with a Jouvert band, it's still a good idea to wear old clothes, as revellers delight in getting everyone as dirty as possible. Certainly, it's a time to leave your inhibitions (and your valuables) at home.

Once the bacchanal of Jouvert has dispersed, the **Carnival Monday** parade begins by 11am, when the mas bands take to the streets, with masqueraders wearing either parts of their costume or a hotpants/shorts and T-shirt combo and dancing along to the accompaniment of steel pan bands or monstrous trucks bearing columns of speakers. **Tuesday** is Carnival's big day, with masqueraders in the bands dressing in full costume and parading through the streets as loudly and proudly as they can, all competing for the much coveted **Band of the Year** title. Bands follow set routes, with judging points along the way where panels of experts (and crowds of spectators) wait to mark each one. The main "stage" and judging point, where each band struts as much of its stuff as possible, is the Queens

Essential Carnival vocabulary

Bands These are not musical bands, but an organized group of costumed masqueraders.

Chipping Slow, shuffling dance-cum-walk with a rhythm dictated by the music from trucks and steel bands.

Fete A large open-air party or concert held during the run-up to Carnival.

Jump up To dance in the parade.

Mas Short for masquerade.

Mas camp The headquarters of Carnival bands, where costumes are made and registrations to be part of a band are taken.

Ole' mas Traditional Carnival characters such as jab jabs, imps and sailors; ole' mas also refers to placard-carrying characters with a mission to lambast the politicians of the day.

Play mas To join a Carnival band and take part in the costumed parade.

Road march The soca song played the most at the judging points along the Carnival route – the winner gets the coveted road march title for that year.

Rhythm section The classic accompaniment of Jouvert, as well as the "engine room" that drives a steel band, this is a percussion group who "beat iron"– scrapped brake drums from cars or vans played with metal rods alongside cowbells, shakers and anything that can make a rhythm.

Wining The classic hip-wiggling, gyrating Trini dance, which comes in many variations: be prepared to wine, and be wined on, at any point during Carnival.

Park Savannah in Port of Spain and Scarborough's Market Square. As well as the bikini bands, you'll also see smaller outfits portraying **traditional mas** characters from blue devils to Dame Lorraines, jab molassis and midnight robbers; to really get a flavour of old mas, take in one of the separate parades from South quay to Adam Smith Square on the two Sundays preceding Carnival; check the press for details. Another brilliant option is to head up to Paramin (see p.90), where a wild parade of **blue devils** takes to the streets on Carnival Monday afternoon and continues well into the night.

Carnival's **las' lap** kicks in at dusk on Carnival Tuesday when everything becomes just a bit more frantic as the last hours of the event are made the most of, until midnight strikes and one year's Carnival officially ends and the count down to next year's begins.

For **more on Carnival**, including a calendar of events, see p.98; for mas camps and playing mas and Jouvert see pp.82–83; for fetes see p.100 and for panyards see box, p.88.

Music

Trinidad and Tobago's music scene is one of the most exciting and influential in the Caribbean, inextricably linked to the annual Carnival celebrations which give the islands' homegrown genres a stage in which to shine. Downtempo, lyrically based calypso (more traditionally known as kaiso) is very much alive thanks largely to the festival's performance "tents" and Calypso Monarch competition, while the fetes – and the parades of Caribbean carnivals throughout the region and the world – reverberate to the faster, more contemporary-sounding soca. And since it was invented by industrious Trinidadians in the early twentieth century, the lilting tinkle of the steel pan has become synonymous with the region.

However, T&T's musical spectrum is a broad church: at Christmas, you'll hear the Spanish guitars and nasal crooning of **parang**, while East Indian festivals such as Hosay and Phagwah take place to the sound of frenetic **tassa** drumming. Jamaican-style dancehall reggae is extremely popular here, with a host of local artists offering their take on the genre, while **rapso** fuses calypso-style political lyrics, hip-hop beats and distinctly Caribbean basslines. There's also a healthy "alternative" scene, with a slew of great local **rock** bands such as Orange Sky and Jointpop, which blend classic guitar riffs with calypso and reggae; the remarkable 12 the band are a slightly more experimental rock/folk/calypso fusion act that need to be seen to be fully appreciated.

Calypso to soca

The heart of T&T's music scene and one of its greatest cultural exports, **calypso** represents far more than catchy melodies and witty lyrics for older Trinbagonians, most of whom are expert scholars of the genre, using the most obscure quote to

Parang

Created by the combined influences of Spanish missionaries and Venezuelan cocoa workers, the Christmastime sound of **parang** is one of the last vestiges of Spanish influence in Trinidad. During the season, which starts in October and ends with Epiphany (Jan 6), *parranderos* perform *aguinaldos*, sentimental Spanish songs accompanied by rapid, Mediterranean-style strums on four-stringed instruments, usually guitar, mandolin and cuatros, with violin, box bass, tambourines, maracas and other percussion instruments providing backup. Traditionally, *parranderos* went from house to house during the festive season, but these days, most performances take place in bars and clubs.

Parang's Spanish lyrics can be romantic or humorous, though many are devoted to religious themes such as the exploits of saints and the birth of Jesus. Whatever the lyric, the music is always infused with a sense of joyous celebration, and the festivities are enhanced by the consumption of Spanish-derived dishes such as pastelles, arepas and strong draughts of rum or poncha crema, a spirit-laced eggnog.

Though the parang tradition has waned a little in recent years, it still remains strong in communities dominated by people of Spanish and Amerindian ancestry, such as Santa Cruz, San Raphael and St Joseph. At Lopinot (see p.140), site caretaker and master parrandero Martin Gomez is usually willing to give a demonstration at any time of the year, while if you're here at Christmas you'll find that the more contemporary soca-parang is a radio-station staple.

illustrate an argument and singing along to classic compositions without skipping a single nuance. Though calypso is less of a national obsession these days, each crop of compositions is still closely analysed and discussed until the messages become ingrained in the national consciousness. While foreigners often equate the genre with the glib Caribbean clichés of Harry Belafonte's *Banana Boat Song* or *Island in the Sun*, Trinbagonians see calypso as their most accessible form of **social commentary**. Calypsonians use double entendre and allegory to make points that would get a politician arrested for libel or a pop singer for lewdness, and over the years, their lyrics have addressed every phase of T&T's development, commenting on shifts in society and attitudes towards love, sex, marriage, masculinity, race and religion – not to mention politics.

Calypso has its roots in the songs of praise and derision performed in Africa by travelling troubadours known as **griots**. Slaves on the sugar plantations used song as a means of covert communication as well as a rhythmic accompaniment to their back-breaking work, and their **cariso** or **kaiso** was also a form of entertainment for the planters; notorious Diego Martin estate owner Pierre Begorrat could be tempered only by the sweet verses of **Gros Jean**, his personal **chantuelle**, as these nascent calypsonians were known. After emancipation, when the chantuelles were finally able to express themselves as free men, they entertained Carnival revellers with insurgent and satirical quips. However, the British found their uninhibited displays unsettling and associated calypso with vulgarity and **civil disobedience**, a stigma that remained for many years. Clashes between revellers and colonial officers, as well as objections from the upper classes to "obscenity" in lyrics, led to the prohibition of African drumming in 1884. In the absence of drums, musicians were forced to be inventive, and created the **tamboo bamboo** – tuned sticks of bamboo beaten on the ground to give a variety of percussive notes – to provide a legal rhythm for their mas and calypso.

Calypso's golden era

Calypso evolved rapidly in the early twentieth century: English replaced French patois, and brass and string instruments took over from the basic rhythms of the tamboo bamboo. Armed with suitably boastful sobriquets, calypsonians such as **Atilla the Hun**, **Growling Tiger**, **Lord Invader**, **Lord Melody** and **Chieftain Douglas** refined their art and turned professional, performing for paying audiences at makeshift venues in downtown Port of Spain known as **tents**. Though veiled in metaphor and double entendre, much of the early material was as risqué and **controversial** as it is today; sex, religion, race and satirical portrayals of public figures were the meat of calypsos that usually included the patois disclaimer "**sans humanité**" – "without mercy".

During the 1930s, calypso also found an overseas audience, largely through the efforts of white appropriators such as Paul Whiteman, whose *Sly Mongoose* became a huge US hit in the 1920s. Calypso gradually gained a level of social acceptance, but the colonial government still had a vested interest in controlling what they perceived to be subversive lyrics, and the 1934 **Theatre and Dance Halls Ordinance** enabled the censorship of so-called "offensive" compositions and the outright prohibition of pieces deemed particularly seditious; in reality, any calypso seen to undermine British rule (or champion black culture) was swiftly banned. Calypsonians were required to submit their compositions for government inspection before public performance, and officers stationed in the tents ensured that songs met with British approval. Unsurprisingly, calypsos from this time (which you'll still hear today) are often anti-colonial and anti-European.

During World War II, calypso got another boost through the support of **American troops** stationed at Chaguaramas. Entertainment-hungry soldiers responded enthusiastically to calypso-based nightclub floor shows and the tents were packed to the rafters, the lyrics now accompanied by sophisticated **brass bands**. Calypso's success overseas undermined British suppression, and the genre flourished, though the soldiers' preference for comedy and frivolity over politics or picong (private jokes that went over the head of a foreign audience) led to a trivialization of the lyrics. The brawling, fornicating habits of the soldiers didn't go unnoticed, however, and calypsonians adeptly documented the morally bereft Port of Spain society during American occupation. An infamously cynical take on the American presence, Lord Invader's *Rum and Coca Cola* (see p.105) was one of the best of these biting commentaries; ironically, a cover version by the Andrews Sisters sold five million copies in the US, though Maxine Andrews later commented that none of the sisters gave a moment's thought to the lyrics, which just "went over our heads". Denied a share of the profits, Invader successfully sued.

Dominated by **Mighty Sparrow** and the inimitable late **Lord Kitchener**, calypso grew in popularity throughout the 1950s and 1960s. Tourists descended on T&T to experience this latest craze first-hand and the tents went from strength to strength, with new venues springing up each year. In 1956, Dr Eric Williams' newly elected PNM government created the **Calypso King** competition, and Sparrow swept to victory with the classic *Jean and Dinah*, which gloried in the fact that local women would have to fall back on Trini men now that US soldiers had departed. Crowned monarch so many times that he was eventually barred from competition and given the special title of "Calypso King of the World", Sparrow continued to overshadow his competitors, and calypso lyrics settled into two strands: political praise or picong, and salacious references to love and sex.

Though Independence in 1962 prompted a slew of calypsos infused with optimism, the late 1960s saw militant lyricists such as **Valentino**, **Black Stalin** and **Mighty Chalkdust** delivering incisive commentaries on post-colonial society. But despite some innovations – **Calypso Rose** became the first female "king" in 1978, and the competition was renamed **Calypso Monarch** – the 1970s turned out to be a decade of stagnation for calypso. As the anti-establishment, pro-black themes of Jamaican roots reggae held sway over Caribbean musical tastes and sensibilities, calypso lyrics sank to an all-time low of banality. From the early 1980s onwards, **soca** (see opposite) began to overshadow its parent during Carnival season, its more danceable style proving irresistible to revellers, but calypso returned to its roots in the middle of the decade via the sensitive, thoughtful work of **David Rudder**, who in 1986 secured an unheard-of triple victory in the Young King, Calypso Monarch and Road March competitions with his beautiful *Bahia Girl*.

Calypso today

Calypso chugged on through the 1990s and into the new millennium, with the Dimanche Gras performances of artists such as **Shadow**, **Singing Sandra**, **Sugar Aloes** and **Gypsy** becoming increasingly extravagant, with props and costumes that make each delivery into a piece of mini theatre – in 2010, **Kurt Allen** caused a sensation by singing his winning composition *Too Bright* while dressed as a vagrant and surrounded by a full set that re-created Woodford Square; his lyrics, meanwhile – a scathing criticism of the incumbent PNM government and the opposition – marked a return to the glory days of the genre. In recent years, the Junior Calypso Monarch competition has also gone from strength to strength; judging by 2010 winner Aaron Duncan, aged just 7 when he delivered his brilliantly assured *Doh Waste It*, the future of calypso seems a lot brighter these days.

The Monarch competition is still underpinned by the **tents**, where an older crowd of enthusiasts disentangle the metaphors and squeal at jokes that are often unintelligible without a good knowledge of Trinbago affairs and gossip. Most calypsonians concentrate on two numbers during the season, usually one with a political slant and another with a more lighthearted theme, be it picong or sex; whether they get to perform them both is up to the audience – after the first few verses, each artist leaves the stage, returning only if the claps and catcalls are deemed loud enough to bring them back on. These days, the most established tents have a permanent location and a roster of well-known artists supplemented by the year's crop of promising newcomers; line-ups change annually, and the lists below are not definitive. Traditional kaiso is best heard at **Calypso Revue**, the former home of Lord Kitchener, where the stalwart line-up usually includes Chalkdust, Sugar Aloes, Baron and Crazy. **Kaiso House** is equally good, with Singing Sandra, Valentino, Gypsy and Brother Resistance. (For addresses and practical information on the tents, see the Carnival calendar, p.98; for more on calypso, visit the website of governing body TUCO, Ⓦwww.tuco.co.tt.)

Soca

Most attribute the birth of **soca** to the great calypsonian **Lord Shorty** (later Ras Shorty I after he converted to Rastafarianism), who died in 2000. Distressed at the moribund state of 1970s calypso, he made a conscious decision to breathe new life into the genre. The Indian instrumentation and souped-up rhythmic structure of what he called **sokah** was an infinitely more danceable form that fitted right in with the disco craze, and when he unveiled his song *Indrani* in 1973, it took T&T by storm.

Since Blue Boy's *Soca Baptist* became the Road March (the most heavily played tune as mas bands pass judging points on the Carnival route) of 1980, soca has dominated Carnival and become the music of choice among a nation of professional feters, sustained by more than 400 new releases per year. From November or December onwards, soca artists release their new material; by the time they perform them at the Carnival fetes, everyone knows the year's crop of music well, waving their rags when commanded or launching into the dances that accompany some of the most popular songs. In 1994, the soca/calypso dichotomy was officially recognized when a separate **Soca Monarch** competition was set up. The climax of the soca madness that envelops pre-Carnival Trinidad, Soca Monarch easily surpasses Calypso Monarch in terms of crowd numbers, with pyrotechnics and ever more extravagant performances serving as an explosive opener to Carnival weekend. The early years of the competition were dominated by **Super Blue**; his daughter, **Fay-Ann Lyons**, has taken the title twice, in 2003 and 2009, while other recent winners include her husband, **Bunji Garlin**, as well as **Shurwayne Winchester** and **Iwer George**. The Soca Monarch competition also includes a category for the slightly slower and more mellow **groovy soca**. The **Road March** title, meanwhile, is usually taken by heart-throb and expert winer **Machel Montano**, so huge a star that he never competes in the monarch competition. Having shot to fame in 1986 with *Too Young to Soca* while still in primary school, he went on to form the band **Xtatic**, a conglomeration of artists within which Machel was always the most prominent. Today, his Machel Montano HD "family" of Machel, **Patrice Roberts**, **Farmer Nappy** and others are easily the most popular soca act around. Other artists to look out for include **Destra Garcia**, one of the genre's few enduring female artists; ladies' favourite **Kes the Band**; and the ever-raunchy **Denise Belfon**. Soca's big names also include a strong contingent from **Barbados**, most notably **Alison Hinds**, who headlines at Trini fetes throughout Carnival season; Arrow, the man behind the world's most overplayed soca hit *Hot, Hot, Hot*, actually hails from Montserrat.

Chutney soca

Sparse, fast soca-style beats mixed with sitars, thumping dholak drums and vocals that lean heavily on traditional Indian singing styles, **chutney** is a contemporary take on classical Indian music and *filmi* movie songs. Sung in a mixture of Hindi and English, lyrics tend towards the lighthearted (often with a good dollop of sentimentality), while chutney fetes have become a showcase for sensual dance steps that combine athletic wining with the delicate arm and hand movements of classical Indian dance. However, many older Hindus dislike chutney, finding the overtly sexual dancing and sometimes risqué lyrics distasteful.

Established in 1996, the **National Chutney Soca Monarch** competition is the annual focus for chutney artists, and the finals (usually held at Skinner Park in San Fernando) now attract up to 20,000 enthusiasts. Classic chutney performers include the wonderful **Drupatee Ramgoonai**, **Sonny Mann** and the late **Sundar Popo**, while more contemporary acts to look out for include the smooth **Rikki Jai** (multiple winner of the Chutney Monarch competition), **Dil-e-Nadan**, **Hitman**, **Hunter**, **Heeralal Rampartap** and **Rooplal Girdharie**; **Ravi B and Karma** took the 2010 Chutney Monarch title with *Drinker*, a ridiculously catchy example of the so-called "rum songs" that the genre has become known for in recent years. Today, chutney is by no means the preserve of the East Indian community alone; big chutney acts regularly headline at Carnival fetes, while many black Trinidadian stars, from Machel Montano to Sherwayne Winchester, employ chutney-style instrumentation into their music, and Brother Marvin's classic *Jahaji Bhai* was a monster hit in 1996.

Steel pan

Said to be the only new acoustic instrument of the twentieth century, the **steel pan** evolved from the Trinbagonian propensity for using available materials as percussion instruments. During the Carnivals of the 1930s, tamboo bamboo-led kalinda music was supplied by bands of young men from deprived areas such as Port of Spain's Laventille and Belmont, who were unanimously viewed as "bad johns" or thugs by the more fortunate. With names such as Desperadoes and Invaders, these loosely organized bands supplemented the tamboo with **rhythm sections**, beating steel rods against anything from brake drums and buckets to dustbin lids to create a danceable beat. It was only a matter of time before someone realized that discarded saucepans or biscuit tins – and later the oil drums brought over by US troops – could be hammered into concave sections that produced rough notes; these early raw materials explain why steel drums are known as **pans**. Depending upon who you believe, the first pan was played at some point in the late 1930s either by **Winston Spree Simon** of the John John band (now Carib Tokyo), who tapped out *Mary Had a Little Lamb*, or **Neville Jules** of Hell Yard (now Trinidad All Stars) who managed the basic chords of a calypso called *Whoopsin, Whoopsin*.

By the end of the war, experimentation had produced basic pans with up to fourteen notes, and the 1946 Carnival was dominated by the ringing of steel bands. However, the associations of **violence** lingered, and the panyards that sprang up throughout the East–West Corridor were widely viewed – probably quite correctly – as seething dens of iniquity. Feuds were common, and in 1950 a bloody pitched battle between Invaders and Tokyo had Carnival revellers running for cover. Calypsonian Blakie documented the clash: "It was bacchanal/Fifty Carnival/Fight for so, with Invaders and Tokyo/When the two bands clash/Mamayoe, if yuh see cutlass/Never me again/To jump in a steelband in Port of Spain."

However, the violence tailed off after this and the movement gained respectability (and respect) as the music became more polished and complex. Soon, bands of up to 200 pannists were playing a sophisticated repertoire of classical pieces as well as calypso, and the nation's dedication to pan began in earnest. In 1950, the **T&T Steelband Association** (now **Pan Trinbago**; Ⓦwww.pantrinbago.co.tt) was established to promote and coordinate the movement, setting up a round of competitions that eventually led to the first annual Panorama tournament in 1963; twenty-odd years later, the steel pan was officially declared the national instrument.

These days, the pan calendar revolves around **Panorama**, a hugely popular affair that involves almost all of T&T's steel bands and attracts big crowds to its finals, held at Port of Spain's Queen's Park Savannah. To qualify for the event, bands must get through the preliminary stage, with judges visiting panyards in the various **regional zones**. Those that qualify take part in the semi-finals at the Savannah, and the final list battle it out on the Saturday before the main parade. Other pan events include the **Pan in the 21st Century** competition in April or May (see p.36) and the **Steelpan and Jazz Festival** in September; you'll also find details of small-scale events on the Pan Trinbago website.

The steel band

Transforming an oil drum into a shiny, playable **steel pan** demands skill and experience. All pans other than the bass must first be **cut** to size, and a five-pound sledgehammer is used to beat the unopened end into a convex shape. The pan is then **heated** over a wood fire; oil is used to **temper** the metal, and a coating of **chrome** gives a better surface and a shiny finish. The **tuner** then takes over, marking the notes and beating them out with a hammer and chisel, an extremely specialized process that's usually achieved with the help of a keyboard. A finished pan will sell for around US$1200.

In contemporary bands, different types of pan produce a variation of tones. The main melody is held by the **tenor** (or soprano) pan, which has the largest range of notes. **Guitar** and **cello pans** provide the background harmonies, and the booming **bass pan** underpins it all. Most contemporary bands are comprised of between fifty and two hundred volunteer pannists, who play one or two harmonic pans; with up to six instruments, bass pannists have to be pretty dextrous, twisting around to reach the right notes. And no steel band would be complete without its rhythm section or **engine room**, as the percussion section is known. In addition to a conventional drum kit, cow bells, shakers and scrapers, there is the **iron**, assorted bits of metal beaten with iron rods.

Each band is led by an **arranger**, who will adapt music from a variety of sources for the steel band. Though some arrangers work with more than one band, there are several long-standing relationships, such as Len "Boogsie" Sharp with Phase II Pan Groove or Pelham Goddard with Exodus. Though most bands used to play it safe and enter Panorama with calypsos familiar to audience and judges alike, many now enter original compositions, or even adapt recent pop hits.

Reggae

As in the rest of the Caribbean, **reggae** has made massive inroads in Trinidad and Tobago, and at Carnival time you'll even see the current hottest acts from Jamaica gracing the stage at soca fetes, usually as a guest performer in Machel Montano's set. There's also a lively **local reggae** scene, with artists such as **Marlon Asher**, **Prophet Benjamin** and **King David** leading the way, while local DJ families such as **Matsimela** play regularly at parties and clubs. Reggae has also lent its influence to soca, with many artists employing Jamaican vocal styles (and language and accent), while soca rhythms have become increasingly intertwined with dancehall from Jamaica; indeed, Jamaican artists usually release songs voiced on the most popular soca rhythm tracks of the year, either solo or in collaboration with Trini vocalists.

Rapso

A fusion of African-style drumbeats, soca melodies and spoken calypso-esque vocals infused with the militancy of 1990s hip-hop, **rapso** is a highly politicized genre that, while it has its followers, has always retained something of an underground feel. The genre's originator is generally considered to be **Lancelot "Kebu" Layne**, who released *Blow Away* in 1970 and *Get Off My Radio* in 1971. In 1976, "Mother of Rapso" **Cheryl Byron** became the first rapso artist to perform in a calypso tent, while **Brother Resistance** emerged as the "Father of Rapso" in the 1980s, and has become something of a spokesman for the genre, famously describing it as "the power of the word in the rhythm of the word". Rapso's popularity increased in the 1990s with the emergence of a host of new artists, though stalwarts such as Resistance, **Ataklan** and **3 Canal** remain the movement's most popular proponents, fusing poetic, haunting lyrics that centre upon black empowerment and resistance to oppression with stinging, drum- and bass-dominated rhythms. **Rapso month**, held at venues across Port of Spain in April or May (see p.36), is a great opportunity to hear the rising stars of this newest expression of T&T's seemingly endless musical fertility, but rapso artists perform locally throughout the year.

Flora and fauna

Joined to the South American mainland during the Ice Age when sea levels were lower, Trinidad and Tobago only became separate entities when movements of the Caribbean tectonic plates submerged the Orinoco Delta some 10,000 years ago. The islands owe their immense environmental diversity to this period of attachment, which has left them with many South American plants, animals and birds alongside the flora and fauna found elsewhere in the Caribbean. Few places of relative size harbour such variety.

A wide range of **habitats** supports the wildlife; **Tobago** boasts the oldest protected rainforest in the Western Hemisphere along its main ridge of mountains, as well as marshes and lagoons in the western tip, a network of ornate offshore reefs and the bird sanctuaries of Little Tobago and the St Giles islands. In **Trinidad**, the rich wetlands at Nariva swamp support several plant and animal species found nowhere else in T&T, while Caroni swamp offers easy access to mangroves and their inhabitants. The dry, treeless prairie at Aripo – the island's only remaining true savannah plain – sustains unusual plants and orchids as well as birdlife. Trinidad's hills are afforded some government protection, and contain three state reserves: the Northern Range Sanctuary, the Valencia Wildlife Sanctuary in the northeast and the Trinity Hills Wildlife Sanctuary in the southeast. However, with only a handful of game wardens and rangers to defend the forests, and the industrial wasteland of the west coast constantly encroaching on virgin land (particularly in light of the aluminium smelter project; see p.190), the island's wildlife is under constant threat. For more on the T&T environment, visit the **websites** of Environment Tobago (Ⓦwww.environmenttobago.net) or the Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists Club (Ⓦttfnc.org).

Trees and shrubs

Although T&T's **woodlands** are disappearing at a significant rate, they still make up around 40 percent of the country's total land area. The various forest types include littoral woodland, deciduous seasonal woodland, rainforest and swamp forests; higher elevations see **montane** forest – wet and cool with plenty of epiphytic growth – while the stubby 2-metre canopy of **elfin** forest occupies only the highest mountain peaks.

About **350 species** of tree grow in T&T, including the exotically named pink bark, gustacare, crapaud, saltfishwood, sardine, purpleheart, bloodwood, hairy cutlet and naked Indian. Forests are mostly made up of **mora**, **teak**, **mahogany**, **cedar**, **cypre**, **Caribbean pine** and **balata**; the latter produces a milky latex used to coat golf balls. Immediately noticeable, the **bois cano** has large, deeply lobed leaves that dry into a distinctive claw shape; and the mighty 40-metre **silk cotton** or kapok tree (its fruits contain the cotton-like kapok) boasts an impressive girth of buttressed roots spreading elegantly to meet the ground – Amerindians used entire trees for their dug-out pirogues. With its spectacular spreading branches, **samaan** are often planted as shade trees, while the **banyan** looks more like a collection of interweaved vines than a tree, as its boughs produce aerial roots that form secondary trunks when they reach the ground. The **tree fern**'s diamond-patterned trunk and top-heavy crown of fern-like leaves lend a primeval aspect to high altitude forests.

Ornamental trees

A host of **ornamental** trees turn T&T's forests into a patchwork of colour during the dry months (Dec–May), when the intense orange-red flowers of the mountain **immortelle** compete with two varieties of **poui**, which shed their leaves to make way for cascades of dusky pink or bright yellow blossoms. The **cassia** also produces prolific cascades of deep yellow or pink. Covering a flat, wide-spreading crown, the deep red **flamboyant** or poinciana blooms in August as well as April; during the dry season, half-metre pods full of rattling seeds dangle from the leafless branches.

Flowering sporadically throughout the year, the 15-metre **African tulip** or "flame of the forest" produces clusters of deep-red blooms along outer branches; unopened buds in the centre of the flower are sometimes used as natural water pistols, as they contain a pouch of water which spurts out at speed when pressure is applied. Creating patches of mauve throughout Trinidad's forests, the crown of the **crepe myrtle** is usually smothered with blooms, while **bauhinia** or orchid tree and **jacaranda** add to the purple hues.

Fruit trees

Among the huge variety of **fruit trees**, the most easily recognizable is the **mango**, with its rounded, dense crown of long, leathery leaves over a short trunk. **Banana** plants are not trees in the strict botanical sense; their huge, tattered leaves grow from a central stem of overlapping leaf bases. Covered by large purple bracts, the flowers hang from the main stem and eventually develop into fruit. **Plantain** trees are similar, with larger, less tattered leaves and bigger, more robust fruit. Equally easy to recognize, **pawpaw** (papaya) has a long hollow stem with large splayed leaves and fruit at the top.

Still grown in groves for export, **cocoa** is easily identifiable by its lichen-smothered trunk and dark green shiny leaves; the 20-centimetre ridged oval pods grow from the trunk and turn from light green to brown, yellow, orange or purple when ripe. Covered with a sweet white gloop, the beans inside can be sucked when raw, but are usually dried and roasted to make cocoa powder. **Cashew** trees, with their strongly veined oval leaves, are common; the familiar nut pokes out of the bottom of a sweet-tasting, pear-shaped red fruit, whose shell produces an oily liquid that is a skin irritant.

The lifeblood of many a craft vendor, the fruits of the **calabash** tree grow to more than 35cm in diameter and are hollowed out and made into bowls, bags and all manner of souvenirs. Employed as a vegetable but classified as a fruit, **breadfruit** was brought to the Caribbean by Captain Bligh aboard the HMS *Providence* as food for plantation slaves, and is common throughout T&T. With spreading branches decorated by large serrated leaves, the spherical fruits are lime-green and pockmarked. Its close cousin is the chataigne or **breadnut**, a similar tree with smaller, spiky fruits that are eaten roasted.

Coastal trees and palms

Trinidad's swamps of red, black and white **mangrove** trees, with their dense tangle of aerial roots, help protect coastal communities from hurricane surges, filter sediments that smother reefs and provide a nursery for fish and crustaceans. Common seashore plants include the wide-spreading **sea grape**, whose flat, round leaves are distinctively veined and turn a deep red as they mature. Definitely one to avoid, the **manchineel** tree grows to about 15m with a wide spreading canopy dotted with indistinct green fruits and flowers, all of which are extremely

poisonous – even standing below a manchineel during rain incurs blistering from washed-down sap.

Commercial plantations on both islands have made the **coconut** T&T's most prevalent palm. It's an incredibly versatile tree; the water and meat are consumed fresh at the jelly stage, while the flesh of older coconuts is grated and used in baking or immersed in water and strained to produce the coconut milk that flavours a thousand local dishes. Coconut oil is used in soap, cosmetics and cooking; the leaf fronds thatch roofs and make hats or floor mat; the husks are used to make floor buffers; and pieces of hard shell are made into jewellery and cups. Of the many ornamental varieties, the 30-metre **royal palm** is a graceful specimen with a grey, ruler-straight trunk; it's often used to mark out driveways. Similar but even taller at an average of 40m, the **cabbage** palm has thicker, messier looking fronds, while the squat, spiky-leafed **cocorite** is one of the most common forest species. The ultimate in tropical splendour, the **traveller's palm** is actually a member of the banana family – the name refers to mini-ponds at the base of the trunk that provide a convenient water source. Fronds fan out from the base in an enormous peacock's tail shape as high as 10m.

Plants and flowers

Of T&T's various **wild plants**, the **jumbie bead vine** produces distinctive red and black seeds used in craft items and as good luck charms; they are said to ward off evil spirits, and a bead kept in a purse will keep it filled with money. A variety of mimosa with scratchy stems, **ti Marie** is known as "the sensitive plant" for its ability to curl back its leaves at the slightest touch; you'll see patches of it on lawns throughout the islands.

The largest of the epiphytes that grow along tree branches, electricity wires and any available surface is the **wild pine bromeliad**, a spiky-leafed relative of the pineapple that produces a battered-looking red flower. These "air plants" are not parasites – they draw their nutrients from the mineral-rich rainforest atmosphere – but water reserves trapped between the leaves (which provide a habitat for insects and frogs) can mean that smothered tree limbs often collapse under their weight. Other epiphytes include 200 different species of **orchids**, which grow on living or dead plant or tree matter and in lowland savannahs such as Aripo in eastern Trinidad. In the lowland forests, both the **monkey throat** and the pendulous **jack spaniard** with its trailing wasp-like petals are particularly distinctive, while the common **lamb's tail** grows horizontally from large trees, and has attractive maroon-flecked green petals with a white and pink stamen.

T&T's 2300 varieties of **flowering plant** provide beds, borders and hedges with a splash of colour, and you'll often see several varieties of multicoloured **croton** leaves in between the blooms. The national flower is the **chaconia**, a wild poinsettia which you'll see throughout the forests, but the ubiquitous **bougainvillea** is the most spectacular ornamental, its red, white, orange, purple and pink papery bracts spilling out into intensely coloured clumps. Distinguishable by its protruding pollen-tipped stamen, **hibiscus** takes on an abundance of hues and shapes – the lacy **coral** variety has clusters of tiny curling red petals and a red frill at the end of the stamen. A dark-leafed shrub with clusters of small red flowers, **ixora** is another popular ornamental that flowers throughout the year.

Flamboyant **tropical flowers** are grown commercially in T&T and also flourish in the wild. Brush-like **ginger lilies** are one of the most common exotics; the deep pink or red bracts hide the insignificant true flower, and the shiny, banana-like leaves are used in flower arrangements. A close relative, the **torch ginger**'s deep crimson cluster of thick waxy petals makes an impressively showy head. However, the queen of local exotics – and the symbol of the PNM political party – are the 40 vividly coloured varieties of **balisier**, all members of the heliconia family, which include the aptly named **lobster claw** and the red, yellow and green **hanging heliconia**, which looks like a series of fish hanging from a rod. Equally prevalent are the artificial-looking **anthuriums**, a shiny, heart-shaped red, pink or white bract with a long penile stem or spadix protruding from the centre. The flashy **bird of paradise**, a blue and purple flower that resembles a bird's head graced by a deep orange crest, is rarer.

Fauna

With more than 100 species of **mammal** roaming the forests and flats (not including T&T's 50,000-plus goats), hunting remains a popular pastime and wild meat is consumed with gusto whenever available. Most hunters go after the most common animals; aside from the burgeoning populations of red squirrel, the smallest quarry is the herbivorous **agouti**, a rabbit-sized brown rodent that looks like a long-legged guinea pig and feeds on fruits and leaves; and its larger relative the **lappe** or **paca**, which has longer legs and a pattern of stripes and spots on its fur. Equally desirable for the pot is the **manicou** or **opossum**, an unattractive cat-sized marsupial with a rat-like tail and a long snout that forages for scraps and carrion. The nine-banded **tatoo** (armadillo) is increasingly rare, as is the brown-coloured **red brocket deer** (extinct in Tobago) and the **quenk**, an aggressive wild hog. Another threatened species, the metre-long **ocelot** wildcat has been extensively hunted for its beautiful spotted pelt.

Otters live in and around the Madamas and Paria rivers in Trinidad, but shy away from humans. Trinidad's cutest water-dwelling mammal, the herbivorous West Indian **manatee** or sea cow grows up to 4m long and can live for fifty years. However, the destruction of its swampland habitat by development and by drainage for agriculture has decimated local populations, with around thirty still living in the protected Nariva swamp.

The islands' largest **monkey** colonies also live in Nariva; with red-furred, hulking frames and a bulbous, bearded larynx, troops of up to fifteen **red howlers** defend their territory with the eerie, deafening roars that prompted their name. Smaller but extremely intelligent **weeping capuchins** live in the tree-tops in troops of up to twenty, and are able to use basic tools to crack open nuts as well as occasionally expressing their irritation at human intrusions by raining down a volley of sticks on curious heads. Around sixty species of **bat** inhabit T&T's forests and caves, most living on a diet of insects, fruit, nectar and pollen. The two notable exceptions are the vampire bat, which prefers a more gruesome food source, creeping up on sleeping livestock and drinking their blood, and the frog-eating bat, which distinguishes between poisonous and edible species by listening to mating calls.

Reptiles and amphibians

The largest of the seventy species of **reptile** is an endemic sub-species of the **spectacled caiman**, a 3-metre alligator with an elongated snout that inhabits swamps, rivers and dams, and feeds on fish and birds. Among the 47 different **snakes**, only four are venomous. With the girth of a man's arm and a length of up to 3m, the **fer-de-lance** is particularly aggressive, and is identifiable by its pointed head, yellow underside and chin, and orange-brown triangular markings. The **bushmaster** is slightly longer (up to 4m) with a burnt orange skin distinctly patterned by dark brown diamonds with smaller diamonds of orange within. Its venom can be lethal to the young, old or infirm, but most people manage to get the antidote in time. For advice on dealing with snake bites, see "Health", p.51. Both snakes are known as mapepire (pronounced "mah-pee-pee") and inhabit forest areas. The two varieties of poisonous **coral snake**, the common and large coral snake, are smaller, rarer and less aggressive; they're easy to spot, with black skin and red and white rings around the body. Known as macajuel (pronounced *makka*-well), **boa constrictors** – including anacondas – are T&T's largest snakes, and can grow up to 10m in length. Most are patterned with brown diamonds that provide camouflage. They are not venomous, but can easily crush a large mammal in their powerful coils.

Among more than twenty species of lizard are **geckos**, usually referred to as zandolie or ground lizards. The **twenty-four-hour lizard** gets its name from a local myth which warns that if you disturb one, it will attach itself to your body and remain there for 24 hours – at the end of which you die. The bright-green, spiky-backed, herbivorous **iguana** is a favourite delicacy, especially if it's carrying eggs; unsurprisingly, it spends most of its time hiding from human captors in leafy tree-tops. The metre-long, dark brown **matte lizard** relies on speed to stay out of the cooking pot, raising itself onto its hind legs to accelerate to 11kmph in two seconds.

T&T's most common **amphibian** is the crapaud (pronounced "crappo"), a warty, hand-sized frog with a loud, booming croak. Another frog, the colostethus, provides a night-time chorus reminiscent of a demented guinea pig. Trinidad's only endemic species, the **golden tree frog**, lives in epiphytic plants that cling to the rainforest trees of the island's two highest mountains, El Tucuche and El Cerro del Aripo. In addition to the land turtle, or morocoy, five species of **sea turtle** lay their eggs on T&T's beaches: the green turtle, the olive ridley, the hawksbill, the loggerhead and the giant leatherback (see p.148 & *The Great Outdoors* colour section).

Birds

With more than 430 recorded types of **birds**, Trinidad and Tobago ranks among the world's top ten in terms of numbers of species, and offers the best birdwatching in the Caribbean (for more on which see Basics, p.38 & *The Great Outdoors* colour section). The national birds are the scarlet ibis (Trinidad) and the cocrico (Tobago), both of which adorn the republic's coat of arms; the latter is paradoxically classified as vermin. A native of Venezuela and best seen at the Caroni swamp, the **scarlet ibis** typifies the eye-catching colours of local species, while the golden-brown, pheasant-like **cocrico** has a fleshy, bright red turkey-style wattle at its throat and a raucous, incredibly loud call that echoes through Tobago's hills in the pre-dawn hours.

The sugar-water feeders at most hotels are a great way to see smaller birds at close quarters. There are fifteen species of brightly coloured **hummingbirds** in T&T, of which the most frequently seen are the copper-rumped hummingbird and the white-necked jacobin, both with fabulous iridescent feathers The most unusual hummer is the 6-centimetre **tufted coquette**, Trinidad's smallest bird and the third smallest in the world, with a red and yellow body, dark wings and a pretty red crest.

Oilbirds

Squat, mottled-brown and whiskered, oilbirds have the honour of being the world's only nocturnal fruit-eating birds, and Trinidad supports eight breeding colonies. Spending the daylight hours inside the caves in which they nest, oilbirds are unusually gregarious; up to forty will huddle on a single ledge, squawking and picking through each others' feathers for parasites. Mature birds venture into the open only at night, using sonar to assist their manoeuvres through the forests in search of palm, laurel and camphor fruits, often travelling as far as 120km from the colony in each foray. Fruits are swallowed whole and the seeds regurgitated, and their in-flight consumption is an important agent of reforestation.

Oilbirds rear one brood of young each year, laying between two and four eggs over several days in nests constructed from regurgitated, cement-like matter that rapidly turns the snowy-white clutch a dirty brown. Both parents share the 32-day incubation, after which the blind, featherless fledglings emerge, remaining immobile for up to three weeks and feeding on partially digested fruit pulp. Development is slow; a patchy cover of downy feathers grows after 21 days, and young birds don't fledge until they are 100 to 120 days old.

A young oilbird weighs twice as much as a mature one, due to the high fat content that gave rise to its name. Amerindians and Capuchin monks used to boil the fledglings down for their oil, which they then used to fuel cooking fires and make flambeaux; Amerindians also called the oilbird guacharo, "the one who wails and mourns", on account of the rasps, screams, squawks and snarls that make up its call; an eerie sound that also inspired the bird's French patois sobriquet, diablotin – devil bird.

Both jet-black, the blunt-beaked **smooth-billed ani** and the **shiny cowbird**, with a sharper beak and beady yellow eyes, are the local equivalent of pigeons. The audacious 10cm black and yellow **bananaquit** is supposed to subsist on nectar, but has become a frequent visitor to hotel breakfast tables, dipping its sharp little beak into fruits and sweet preserves. Seen wherever there are cattle, white **egrets** roost on ruminating rumps in a mutually rewarding relationship that provides the egret with a constant supply of insects and the cow some relief from bloodsuckers.

In the forests and flats, frequently sighted birds include **white-bearded manakins**, which perform intricate courtship displays in designated areas known as leks (several other species also use leks), several intensely coloured **woodpeckers**, **antbirds**, **trogons** and **tanagers** – the palm tanager is a cool olive with black flecks on its wings, while the bay-headed variety is a brilliant emerald with a russet head. Various **honeycreepers** display dazzling hues of turquoise and black; the purple variety's near-black feathers only show their true colours in the sunshine.

Of larger birds, common varieties include multicoloured **toucans**, **parrots**, **yellow orioles** and the crow-like **crested oropendola**, black with a yellow tail, cream beak, beady blue eyes, a truly exotic call and a marvellous way of building nests: metre-long, teardrop-shaped constructions of dry grass that hang in groups from tree boughs. Though it can be hard to spot the **bearded bellbird**, you'll certainly hear its penetrating "bok, bok" call in the hill forests. Birds of prey include the **peregrine falcon**, as well as several kites and hawks, including the **ornate hawk-eagle**, the largest of the lot. The ubiquitous **vultures** – called corbeaux – perform a necessary, if unsavoury, function by devouring dead animals.

Tobago sustains a few species not seen regularly in Trinidad, such as the **red-crowned woodpecker**, **rufous-tailed jacamar** and the **white-tailed**

sabre-wing. The smaller island is also the best place to see **blue-crowned mot-mots** (locally called king of the woods), with deep orange breasts, green-blue heads and long flowing tail feathers. Offshore of both islands, **boobies** and **brown pelicans** trawl for fish, the latter diving from great heights into the sea and scooping up its quarry in its large pouched bill. However, if a **frigate bird** is around, smaller sea birds often lose their catch, as the frigate feeds on stolen goods snatched from the beak of more efficient fishers.

Insects and spiders

With 92 varieties of **mosquito** in T&T, and far too many kinds of **cockroach** (ranging from 7cm dark-brown pests to the rare albino variety), you could be forgiven for doing your best to disregard the rest of the country's invertebrate life, but many species are vital to the local ecosystems. More than 600 varieties of **butterfly** flit between local flowers, ranging from the 2cm crimson-and-black red devil to the commonly seen bright blue 7cm emperor and the cocoa mort bleu, brown and mauve with eye-like spots on the wings.

Armies of black, brown or red bachac or **leaf-cutting ants**, with almost triangular heads and sharp, sizeable pincers, are divided into ranks. Large workers trim entire shrubs into coin-sized pieces and carry them on their backs to the nest, while smaller workers fend off any potential predators. The leaf-pieces are then shredded and chewed into compost for the cultivation of the fungus that feeds the colony. A single nest may discard as much as 20 cubic metres of waste material in five years, banking it up over the subterranean colony, which houses up to 2.5 million ants. Living in equally complex societies that can number one billion per colony, **termites** attach their large, irregular earthen nests to the sides of trees.

Aside from the spindly-limbed specimens that you'll see indoors, the largest common spiders are black and red **orb-web spinners**, about 8cm long including the legs, and which spin the classic hexagonal web. More unusual is the **trapdoor spider**, which conceals its forest-floor burrow with a hinged doorway, springing out to drag in passing prey. Ten species of **tarantula** range from a delicately hued violet and brown to hairy and black, and can measure between 8 and 15cm including the legs. Apart from a bird-eating variety, most are nocturnal insect hunters that construct their basic, messy-looking web tunnels on grassy banks or in dead wood.

Marine life

Sediment flows from the Orinoco River have prevented the build-up of extensive **reefs** around Trinidad, but the waters off Tobago, where visibility ranges from 12 to 50m, hold some of the Caribbean's richest and most pristine reefs. Among the sixty or so **coral varieties** are rotund brains, patterned with furrowed trenches, branching umber elkhorn and staghorn, stalagmite-like pillar coral and cool green star coral. Extremely striking are the groups of intricate **soft coral** sea plumes, sea whips and purple sea fans, while brilliant yellow **anemones** and red, brown, purple and green **sponges** provide a splash of colour, some growing up to three feet in diameter. Caribbean spiny **lobsters** and green or spotted **moray eels** lurk in the crevices between corals – if provoked, the latter can inflict a nasty bite.

Sand flats and seagrass fields between the reefs host **spiny black sea urchins**; the spines of round white urchins are too short to puncture skin. Long, thin and off-white, **sea cucumbers** sift through the sea floor to feed on deposited nutrients, while **starfish** and **queen conch** snails move slowly along the seagrass blades, vacuuming up organisms that live there.

The reefs harbour a huge variety of multicoloured **tropical fish**, including parrot fish, electric blue creole wrasse, queen and French angel fish, striped grunts and spiny puffer fish – which balloon in size if threatened – as well as tarpon and trigger fish. Giant 7m **manta rays** are best seen around Speyside in Tobago (see p.254); you'll also encounter smaller eagle, spotted and Atlantic torpedo rays, and southern stingrays. **Dolphins** and **porpoises** are common, and docile, 15m **whale sharks** are occasional visitors, feeding on plankton and small fish. Other large fish include reef, tiger and nurse sharks, grouper, dolphin (the fish not the mammal), kingfish (wahoo), tuna, blackjack, marlin, blue cavalli, sailfish, bonita and barracuda. During nesting season, T&T's beaches are also used as nesting sites by **turtles**, most notably giant leatherbacks, for more on the egg-laying process, see p.148 and *The Great Outdoors* colour section.

Books

The reviews below cover some of the best available **books** written about Trinidad and Tobago. All are readily available internationally and in T&T, where you'll also find many more specialized titles not listed here. Books that are especially recommended are marked with a 🏃 symbol.

Fiction

Michael Anthony *Cricket in the Road and Other Stories*. Concise, thought-provoking short stories, rich in descriptive detail. His novel *In the Heat of the Day* is centred on the industrial unrest that led to the 1903 water riots, while *The Year in San Fernando* is an acute portrayal of San Fernando in the 1940s, seen through the eyes of a teenage boy on a year's sojourn from his village home.

Robert Antoni *My Grandmother's Erotic Folk Tales*. Outlandish tales of life on Caribbean island Corpus Christi (aka Trinidad), under US military occupation during World War II, as told by a saucy 97-year-old to her grandson. Wonderfully evocative of wartime Trinidad.

🏃 **Kevin Baldeosingh** *The Autobiography of Paras P* and *The Ten Incarnations of Adam Avatar*. A bitingly funny satirical novel, *Paras* is a brilliant light read; *Adam Avatar* is much more powerful stuff, a retelling of Caribbean history from the inside by way of the central character's many incarnations, from an Amerindian to a white prostitute and a coloured slave-owner.

Valerie Belgrave *Ti Marie*. A romantic, passionate novel set in the late eighteenth century when Britain and Spain were fighting for control of Trinidad – a Caribbean *Gone with the Wind*, but far more intelligent and historically accurate.

Roslyn Carrington *A Thirst for Rain*. Love story set in the St Ann's foothills, centred around food seller Myra and her relationship with saga boy Slim, ex-stickfighter Jacob and teenage daughter Odile, with some fabulous descriptions of Port of Spain.

🏃 **Earl Lovelace** *The Dragon Can't Dance*. A passionate examination of the motivation behind Carnival – if you only read one book about Trinidad, this should be it. In *The Wine of Astonishment*, Lovelace highlights the persecution of the Spiritual Baptists, while *The Schoolmaster* offers a powerful and superbly handled allegory of colonialism. *Salt*, which won the Commonweath Writer's Prize in 1997, is a stunning commentary on freedom from oppression.

Pamela Mordecai and Betty Wilson (eds) *Her True True Name*. Collection of short stories by women writers from the Caribbean. The T&T section includes work from Dionne Brand, Rosa Guy, Marion Patrick-Jones and Merle Hodge.

Shiva Naipaul *The Chip-Chip Gatherers*. A darkly funny tale of the machinations of the one rich man in a poor rural community. His novel *Fireflies* chronicles with empathy and ironic humour the moral, financial and spiritual decline of a rich and influential Indo-Trinidadian family.

🏃 **V.S. Naipaul** *A House for Mr Biswas*. Mr Biswas – a newspaper journalist trapped by poverty into living with his domineering in-laws – struggles to establish his own identity. *In a Free State*, which won the Booker

Trinbagonian literature

Given T&T's diverse cultural heritage, opaque dialect and witty, imaginative use of language, it's no surprise that the islands boast a rich **literary heritage**. A radical 1930s journal featuring poetry and short stories by a host of young Trinidadian writers and intellectuals, the *Beacon* was at the forefront of the emerging literary tradition, but Trinbagonian literature really flourished after World War II. **Samuel Selvon**'s wryly humorous novels chronicle both the experience of growing up in Trinidad and the trials and tribulations of an emigrant in London, while those of **Earl Lovelace** are a lyrical celebration of Trinidadian life and culture, its "shacks that leap out of the red dirt and stone, thin like smoke, fragile like kite paper balancing on their rickety pillars as broomsticks on the edge of a juggler's nose" (*The Dragon Can't Dance*).

The late 1950s saw the appearance of Trinidad's most acclaimed novelist, Nobel prizewinner **V.S. Naipaul**, who grew up in Chaguanas and Port of Spain, and won a scholarship to study English at Oxford University in 1950. He wrote his first book, *The Mystic Masseur* (1957), at the age of 23 while working for the BBC Caribbean Service in London, but it was his fourth, *A House for Mr Biswas*, that made his name in 1961. Naipaul's ironic treatment of the snobbery, corruption and small-mindedness of Trinidadian life has earned him an ambivalent reputation in his homeland, however. His brother **Shiva Naipaul** also garnered substantial literary acclaim with books such as *Fireflies* (1970) and *Beyond the Dragon's Mouth* (1984), before his sudden death of a heart attack at the age of 40 in 1985.

Trinidad's best-known poet, the Nobel Prize-winner **Derek Walcott**, was actually born in St Lucia, but lived in Port of Spain for decades, establishing the Trinidad Theatre Workshop there. An accomplished and prolific lyric poet, Walcott draws on the Elizabethan tradition, using both traditional rhyme and metre and free verse to explore issues of exile and identity and evoke the rich, heady atmosphere of the Caribbean.

Prize in 1971, explores the changing roles and attitudes of people transplanted from their homelands, while *Miguel Street* paints a picture of community life in Trinidad through the eyes of a child. *The Middle Passage* looks at the effects of colonialism on five societies in the Caribbean and South America.

Elizabeth Nunez *The Limbo Silence*. The tale of a Trinidadian girl's efforts to integrate into an all-white school in Wisconsin during the civil rights movement. In *Bruised Hibiscus*, set in a Trinidadian village, the murder of a white woman reunites two childhood friends who are forced to relive memories of witnessing abuse by plantation owners.

Monique Roffey *White Woman on a Green Bicycle*. Beautifully written chronicle of an expat couple in Trinidad, graphically describing the husband's passion for the country and its people alongside the wife's battles with racial politics, humidity and isolation, which she vents through writing letters to Eric Williams. A sometimes depressing picture emerges, both of the couple's gradual estrangement and of T&T itself, from the last gasp of the colonial era through post-independence politicization to contemporary corruption, but it's a gripping and absorbing read throughout.

Lawrence Scott *Ballad for the New World and Other Stories* is a clever collection evoking the experiences of a white boy growing up in pre-Independence Trinidad and the in the colony, with ironic humour and sensitivity. Set on a leper colony off Trinidad's coast, *Night Calypso* revolves around the troubled life of an orphan who goes to live with the island's doctor.

Samuel Selvon *The Lonely Londoners*. A classic and powerful account of West Indian immigrants adjusting to the climate, racism and big-city life of 1950s London. Its sequel, *Moses Ascending* (Heinemann), is an ironic tale of an apathetic Trinidadian's experience of the Black Power movement and race relations in 1970s London.

Amanda Smyth *Black Rock*. Moving between the eponymous coastal village in Tobago, Port of Spain and Tamana in eastern Trinidad, this engaging novel offers an interesting take on T&T just after World War II, with post-colonial racial politics at the heart of the action.

Derek Walcott *Omeros*. An extraordinary *tour de force* that draws on Homer's *Odyssey* to produce a vast Caribbean epic of the dispossessed. Many of the works in Walcott's *Collected Poems 1948–1984* evoke the sights and sounds of Trinidad, including the famous *Laventille*, dedicated to V.S. Naipaul.

History and culture

Stefan Falke *Moko Jumbies: The Dancing Spirits of Trinidad*. Gorgeous coffee-table book capturing the beauty and energy of moko jumbies (stilt-walkers), from the Keylemanjahro School in Cocorite, from practice sessions to glorious Carnival shots.

James Ferguson *A Traveller's History of the Caribbean*. Concise and well-written overview that provides a good introduction to the region's history.

Patrick Leigh Fermor *The Traveller's Tree*. Written in the late 1940s, this classic account of a Caribbean tour has an interesting section on Trinidad, describing Port of Spain with an eagle eye and analysing the island's history, as well as its music and the "saga boy" fashions of the time.

James T. Houk *Spirits, Blood & Drums: The Orisha Religion in Trinidad and Tobago*. An anthropological study of the Orisha religion.

C.L.R. James *Beyond a Boundary*. Classic autobiographical book on cricket which extends into life and society in Trinidad in the 1920s.

John Newel Lewis *Ajoupa*. A marvellously idiosyncratic and enthusiastic account of the unique architecture of Trinidad and Tobago, illustrated by the author's superb line drawings. Hard to find outside Trinidad, but a must of you're interested in local architecture.

Peter Mason *Bacchanal! Carnival, Calypso and the Popular Culture of Trinidad*. Packed with interviews with calypsonians and costume designers, this is the most up-to-date and informative book on Trinidad's Carnival.

John Mendes *Cote Ce, Cote La*. The original dictionary of Trinbagonian words, recently updated and reissued, with sections on Carnival and proverbs and drawings by Carnival designer Wayne Berkley. Widely available on the islands.

Harvey R. Neptune *Caliban and the Yankees*. Fascinating account of the social and economic effects of the American bases at Chaguaramas and Waller Field during World War II, touching on everything from race and sexual politics to the response of calypsonians.

Colin A. Palmer *Eric Williams and the Making of the Modern Caribbean*. Contemporary take on the "father of the nation" and still the most influential figure in the Republic's political history, from his days as a Howard University professor and author to his battle for an independent T&T and his years as the country's prime minister.

B.C. Pires *Thank God it's Friday*. This collection of newspaper columns from the brilliantly irreverent BC traces Trini culture of the last twenty-odd years, and shines a sometimes brutal, often moving light onto the less savoury aspects of Trini culture – from his response to the news that a teenager had been whipped by church members for masturbating, to his spot-on accounts of Carnival.

Alex Smailes *Trinidad and Tobago*. Gorgeous coffee-table photo journal of Trinidad, with an incisive introduction to T&T history and culture by Jeremy Taylor and lovely reproductions of Smailes' photographs in the four sections, Carnival, Land, Water and People. The best visual souvenir on the market.

Natural history

Comeau, Guy, Hesterman and Hill *T&T Field Naturalists' Club Trail Guide*. Recently updated, this is the definitive guide to hiking trails in Trinidad and Tobago with detailed descriptions and sketch maps, and useful sections on local geology and preparing for a hike.

Richard Ffrench *A Guide to the Birds of Trinidad and Tobago*. Definitive guide to T&T's birdlife, including information on habitat, habits, appearance and calls as well as a description of the islands' natural history and environment. The pocket-sized version with pictures and descriptions of 83 common species is handy for travellers.

G.W. Lennox & S.A. Seddon *Flowers of the Caribbean; Fruits and Vegetables of the Caribbean; Trees of the Caribbean*. Slim and handy reference volumes with glossy, sharp colour pictures and concise accounts.

Lawson Wood *Diving and Snorkelling in Trinidad and Tobago*. Essential stuff if you've more than a passing interest in underwater T&T, with detailed descriptions of all the best dive sites on the islands.

Language

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Language

T&T's rich and varied **vocabulary** stems as much from a love of wordplay as it does from the republic's tumultuous history. Though English is the main language, Amerindians, the Spanish and the French have all left their mark, in both place names and common parlance, and in the Trinidadian village of Paramin in Trinidad, French Creole (or patois) is still spoken by elders. Meanwhile, Spanish surfaces in parang lyrics, and Hindi is widely used in Indian communities.

The nation's diverse ethnic mix has also influenced **Creole English**; Trinis will say "it's making hot" as the French would say "Il fait chaud". Terms such as *pomme cythere* (golden apple) and *dou dou* (sweetheart, from the French *doux doux*) are commonplace, and French patois phrases are still part of the vernacular; *tout bagai* and *toute monde* are catch-alls meaning "everything". Hindi words, such as *dougla* and *aloo* (potato), have also entered the local lexicon.

Other idiosyncrasies include a habit of using the part to refer to the whole, calling an arm a hand, or a leg a foot – when someone breaks their arm, for example, they'll say "meh han break". People will also describe the afternoon as evening – it's common to be greeted with "good evening" at 3pm, while "goodnight" is used as a greeting.

Finally, bear in mind that language use here is often oblique and allusive. **Double entendres** are ubiquitous, especially in calypsos, and if you're not well versed in local slang you'll need a Trini interpreter to appreciate the subtleties of many songs.

Common Trinbago expressions

Cockroach have no right in fowl party Don't involve yourself in situations where you're unwelcome or out of place.

Crapaud smoke yuh pipe You are in big trouble.

De fruit doh fall far from de tree Children often turn out like their parents.

Every bread have it cheese Everyone, no matter how ugly, will find his or her matching partner.

Get cage before yuh ketch bird Before you can ensnare a woman, you need a house to put her in.

If you play with dog, you must get fleas Hanging out with lowlifes will eventually rub off on you.

Man plans, God laughs It doesn't matter what you plan to do, it never turns out that way.

Now yuh cookin' with gas When you finally understand or work out how to do something.

When cock get teeth Pigs might fly.

Yuh cyar play sailor an' fraid powder If you're going to be controversial you have to accept the consequences (a sailor mas traditionally includes a heavy coating of talc on the face).

Zandolie fin' yuh hole Know your place and stick to it.

Glossary

Abir Pink dye thrown around by (and among) participants of the Hindu Phagwah festival.

Ajoupa Amerindian building with a palm-thatch roof and walls of clay and cow manure.

All fours Popular card game, often played for money.

Allyuh Everyone: “Allyuh not tired yet?”

Babash An illegal, extremely potent bootleg white rum, also called bush rum and mountain dew.

Bacchanal A rowdy event or social commotion, or just general scandal.

Bachac Large, black-brown leaf-cutting ant, which gives a nasty bite.

Bad John Man of violent or criminal reputation, now a bit outdated.

Bamsie Bottom; backside. A bamsie lambe is an attractive bottom.

Bandit A thief or mugger.

Bareback Term for a man who’s not wearing a top; also unprotected sex.

Bath suit Swimsuit.

Bazodee State of confusion, usually caused by being attracted to someone of the opposite sex.

Beastly Used to describe an extremely cold beer.

Big yard Trinidad’s largest panyard; the Savannah at Carnival time.

Blue food Root vegetables such as dasheen or tannia.

Blues The TT$100 dollar bill.

Bobol Corruption, embezzlement; a **bobolee** is a person easily taken advantage of, as well as an effigy of an unpopular public figure which you’ll see strung up on fences and at roadsides around Easter time, and which is treated to a piñata-like thrashing.

Boldfaced Being pushy or demanding.

Boof To lambast or scold someone: “He get a real boof for staying out last night”.

Bounce Fist-to-fist greeting in place of a handshake – you’ll often be asked to “gimme a bounce nuh?”

Brabadap Loud or uncouth person.

Brass band The bands that back live acts at fetes; traditionally, soca and calypso songs hinge on a repeated brass refrain.

Break a lime To leave when a lime is in full swing, causing others to think about leaving, and often used to guilt-trip the person who wants to leave.

Broughtupsy Solid, proper upbringing – to have no broughtupsy is to have no manners and class.

Brush Sexual intercourse.

Bufaye Vagina.

Buller Derogative term for a gay man.

Bump To get a light from someone else’s cigarette.

Bumper Another word for backside, usually a woman’s.

Bush Generic term for forests and undeveloped countryside, as in “me doh trust de bush, not at all”. Also medicinal herbs; a “bush bath”, “bush tea”.

Buss To do something; eg to “buss a lime”. Also used to describe an unsuccessful event (“De fete buss after Machel perform”).

Cascadura Scaly black fish with folklore asscociations; if you eat it, you’re destined to end your days in Trinidad.

Chip-chip Mollusc found on Trinidad’s beaches; see **pacro**.

Chuffy chubby.

Chunkalunks Term of endearment, usually directed at a child or woman or a pet name for a partner.

Chupidee Something or someone idiotic.

Coco payol Mixed, usually used to refer to a person with a wide-ranging racial background.

Commesse Confusion, controversy, scandal.

Cook up/cook out Food prepared in one pot, usually outside.

Coolie Derogatory term for someone of Indian descent.

Creole A broad term describing a person of mixed European and African descent born in T&T. Also classic Caribbean food, such as callaloo and *coo coo*.

Cut eye A nasty look, also a “bad eye”.

Cutlass Machete.

Dingolay To wind down low or dance unreservedly.

Dotish Stupid, ridiculous-looking. Sometimes “dotishness” as well.

Dou dou Sweetheart.

Dougla Person of mixed Indian and African parentage.

Drivay Waste time.

Ease up To slacken, as in “ease up yuh mout’” (be quiet).

East Indian A person of Indian descent.

Ent Used at the end of a statement to mean “is that not so” or “that’s true isn’t it?”

Fatigue Witty repartee.

Fete A large, open-air party or concert; the biggest are held around Carnival time.

Flambeaux A flaming kerosene torch used by oyster salesmen to advertise their wares.

Flask A half-bottle of rum.

Flim Trini pronounciation of film.

Free up Relax, let go.

Fresh water yankee Mocking term for Trinbagonians who use foreign mannerisms picked up during trips to the US.

Friending Having a sexual relationship with someone.

Funk The end of a weed joint, attached to a cigarette to make it last a little longer and give a subtle added high.

Gallery Verandah or porch outside one’s home; to “gallery” is to show off.

Get on bad To dance and jump up with abandon at a fete.

Ground provisions Root vegetable tubers (yam, dasheen etc), also just “provisions”.

Gyal/gyul Trini pronounciation of girl.

Hard wuk Rough and passionate sex; wuk (work) is a general term for sex.

High-grade Good-quality marijuana.

Hops Bread rolls, usually eaten as “hops an’ ham”.

Horning Two-timing, being unfaithful to your partner.

Horrors Lots of problems, bad vibes caused by anger.

Ital Rastafarian term meaning natural or pure, often used to refer to meatless food cooked with little salt.

Jackspaniard Large, aggressive wasp which delivers a vicious sting; also called a jep.

Jagabat Loose, sluttish woman.

Jamette Woman of questionable morals.

Jumbie Spirit or ghost, also a night person; “boy, you does favour a jumbie calling meh at this time in night”.

Jump-up Frenetic partying or a frenetic party.

Kaiso Old-time word for classic calypso music.

Kicksee Funny.

Lackeray Gossiping.

Laginiappe Pronounced “lan-nyap”, a little extra, a bonus.

Las’ lap Final parade of revellers on Carnival Tuesday before the abstinence of Lent begins.

Licks To lash or hit someone.

Lickser Person who gets free things through sly methods, used with a tone of admiration.

Lime To socialize with friends on the street, in a bar, in a person’s house, by a river, anywhere. T&T’s favourite pastime.

Lyrics Flirtatious sweet talk, usually from a man to a woman.

Maaga Skinny, slim.

Macafouchette Leftovers from a meal.

Maco A busybody prying into other people’s business; also used as a verb.

Macoman/macomeh Derogatory term for an effeminate and gossipy man, or a gay man.

Make style Show off

Maljo Evil eye.

Malkadi Epilepsy. Having a fit.

Mamaguy To fool someone with smart talk that makes false promises.

Mampy Fat woman.

Mas Short for masquerade, used to describe playing in a costume band at Carnival.

Mauvais langue Damaging gossip.

Melongene Aubergine, eggplant. Also called by its Indian name, *baigan*.

Nannie Indian term for a woman's private parts.

Navel string Placenta, buried by the superstitious under a fruiting mango tree to ensure a prosperous life. Also used to denote someone's roots or a place they frequent, as in "yuh navel string eh buried in Carnival fete yuh know".

Ol' talk Idle chatter.

One time Immediately, now.

Outside man/woman A person with whom you are committing adultery.

Pacro Sea barnacle cooked up into "pacro water", a thin fishy broth said to have aphrodisiac qualities.

Pampalam Backside.

Pan The steel drum as a musical instrument.

Pantyman Gay man; also a tell-tale.

Panyard Headquarters of steel pan bands.

Papa yo! An expression of surprise.

Pappy show From puppet show, meaning nonsense, something inconsequential and ridiculous.

Parlour Small grocery store.

Partna Commonly used by men to refer to their close male friends: "Me an me partnas making a lime".

Pelt To throw.

Petit carem Dry spell in the middle of the rainy season, usually in September.

Picong The tradition of making fun of someone through an exchange of witty comments.

Piper Crack user.

Pitch oil Kerosene.

Plam-plam Vagina.

Planasse To hit someone with the flat part of a machete.

Posey Chamberpot. Sometimes placed on the stage by audiences at calypso tents to demonstrate displeasure with a performance; equally, used as a makeshift cup (filled with straight rum) during Jouvert.

Pot hound Skinny mongrel dog.

Pressure General term for stress or problems, as in "it real pressure, man".

Prim To be high on marijuana.

Provision ground Vegetable garden.

Puja Indian prayer or offering to the gods.

Pum pum Vagina. Pum pum shorts are tight hot pants.

Punani Vagina.

Puncheon High-proof rum.

Pwefum Vagina.

Ras Dreadlocks or a person with them.

Real Plenty: "It have real people in the party!".

Reds Someone of African descent but with a light skin colour, also known as high brown.

Rucktion Confusion, bacchanal.

Safe A multifaceted term mainly used as an affirmation meaning all will be OK: "everyting safe".

Saga boy Flashy dresser.

Salt fish Salted cod, as well as a euphemism for a vagina.

Scruntin' Penniless, broke.

Sea bath To go for a swim in the sea.

Semi-demi Something unexpected, a little bit of magic.

Sketel Usually a promiscuous woman, but can also be used for a man.

Skin out To splay ones legs, usually when dancing.

Skin teet To smile.

Slackness Impolite, crude and low-down behaviour.

Sound system A crew of DJs operating the decks and providing the huge speaker boxes at fetes and parties.

Spranger Crack user, petty thief or volatile person.

Steups The Trini version of a "tut", a steups is kissing or sucking the teeth to indicate irritation, disapproval or derision.

Storm Getting into a fete without paying by climbing over the fence, sweet-talking the doorman, etc.

Stupidness The preferred term to describe ridiculous, slack, time-consuming actions or behaviour.

Sweet hand Used in reference to someone who cooks very well.

Sweet to bad Very good: “de curry duck was sweet to bad”.

Sweetman A man who is financially supported by a woman.

Swizzle stick A whisk used for stirring callaloo or juicing fruits to make punch.

Tabanca The depression caused by the ending of a love affair. In extreme states, “tabantruck”.

Tan-ta-na Excitement, confusion.

Tanty Aunt or a person who is like an aunt.

Tapia Hut made with thatch and mud walls.

Thick Pronounced “tik”, and usually used to refer to the (pleasant) plumpness of a woman.

Ting A thing, woman or a euphemism for all kinds of eventualities – “tings a gwan”.

Tittivay Waste time or stir up trouble.

Tobago love Disguising your feelings for a loved one, possibly due to finding it difficult to express your emotions; also the actions of a couple who quarrel all the time.

Torshont (pronounced “torshore”) A loofah.

Tot-tots Breasts.

Totie Penis.

Tout bagai Everything.

Trace A road or street that once was or still is a dirt track.

Travel Using public transport.

Vaps To behave in an overexcited manner; or to indicate something that happens suddenly or a sudden change of mind/mood.

Vex Angry or annoyed.

Vex money Extra money to take out with you, in case you have an argument with your partner and have to pay your own way home.

Wajang A loose woman or hooligan.

Wapie A card game.

Wassi Lewd, uninhibited behaviour and dancing at fetes; wining down to the ground.

We is we You are among friends.

Wine To dance by rotating hips and bottom in an erotic manner. Your “wining bone” is what allows you to move with suitable sensuality.

Wood Penis.

Wrapping paper Cigarette paper used for rolling joints.

Wutless Worthless, no good.

Yampie Matter that collects at the corner of the eyes after sleep.

Yard fowl Chickens raised in someone’s backyard.

Zaboca Avocado.

Small print and

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A Rough Guide to Rough Guides

Published in 1982, the first Rough Guide – to Greece – was a student scheme that became a publishing phenomenon. Mark Ellingham, a recent graduate in English from Bristol University, had been travelling in Greece the previous summer and couldn't find the right guidebook. With a small group of friends he wrote his own guide, combining a highly contemporary, journalistic style with a thoroughly practical approach to travellers' needs.

The immediate success of the book spawned a series that rapidly covered dozens of destinations. And, in addition to impecunious backpackers, Rough Guides soon acquired a much broader and older readership that relished the guides' wit and inquisitiveness as much as their enthusiastic, critical approach and value-for-money ethos.

These days, Rough Guides include recommendations from shoestring to luxury and cover more than 200 destinations around the globe, including almost every country in the Americas and Europe, more than half of Africa and most of Asia and Australasia. Our ever-growing team of authors and photographers is spread all over the world, particularly in Europe, the US and Australia.

In the early 1990s, Rough Guides branched out of travel, with the publication of Rough Guides to World Music, Classical Music and the Internet. All three have become benchmark titles in their fields, spearheading the publication of a wide range of books under the Rough Guide name.

Including the travel series, Rough Guides now number more than 350 titles, covering: phrasebooks, waterproof maps, music guides from Opera to Heavy Metal, reference works as diverse as Conspiracy Theories and Shakespeare, and popular culture books from iPods to Poker. Rough Guides also produce a series of more than 120 World Music CDs in partnership with World Music Network.

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Layout: Sachin Gupta
Cartography: Maxine Repath
Picture editor: Nicole Newman
Production: Erika Pepe
Proofreader: Amanda Jones
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Digital Travel Publisher: Peter Buckley
Reference Director: Andrew Lockett
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Operations Manager: Helen Atkinson
Publishing Director (Travel): Clare Currie
Commercial Manager: Gino Magnotta
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Publishing information

This fifth edition published November 2010 by

Rough Guides Ltd,
80 Strand, London WC2R 0RL
11, Community Centre, Panchsheel Park, New Delhi 110017, India

Distributed by the Penguin Group

Penguin Books Ltd,
80 Strand, London WC2R 0RL

Penguin Group (USA)
375 Hudson Street, NY 10014, USA

Penguin Group (Australia)
250 Camberwell Road, Camberwell, Victoria 3124, Australia

Penguin Group (NZ)
67 Apollo Drive, Mairangi Bay, Auckland 1310, New Zealand
This paperback edition published in Canada in 2010. Rough Guides is represented in Canada by Tourmaline Editions Inc., 662 King Street West, Suite 304, Toronto, Ontario, M5V 1M7

Cover concept by Peter Dyer.

Typeset in Bembo and Helvetica to an original design by Henry Iles.

Printed in Singapore
© Robert Coates, Dominique De-Light and Polly Thomas, 2010
Maps © Rough Guides
No part of this book may be reproduced in any form without permission from the publisher except for the quotation of brief passages in reviews.
320pp includes index
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library
ISBN: 978-1-84836-514-8
The publishers and authors have done their best to ensure the accuracy and currency of all the information in **The Rough Guide to Trinidad & Tobago**, however, they can accept no responsibility for any loss, injury, or inconvenience sustained by any traveller as a result of information or advice contained in the guide.
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Help us update

We've gone to a lot of effort to ensure that the fifth edition of **The Rough Guide to Trinidad & Tobago** is accurate and up-to-date. However, things change – places get "discovered", opening hours are notoriously fickle, restaurants and rooms raise prices or lower standards. If you feel we've got it wrong or left something out, we'd like to know, and if you can remember the address, the price, the hours, the phone number, so much the better.

Please send your comments with the subject line "**Rough Guide Trinidad & Tobago Update**" to Ⓔ mail@roughguides.com. We'll credit all contributions and send a copy of the next edition (or any other Rough Guide if you prefer) for the very best emails.

Have your questions answered and tell others about your trip at Ⓦ www.roughguides.com

Acknowledgements

Robert Coates extends his thanks to guides Ivan Charles, Stephen Broadbridge, Courtenay Rooks and Gunda Harewood, while Lara Baden-Semper, Shawn Small and Nuala Cumberbatch were as ever gracious hosts. Thanks also to Piero Guerrini, Gennike Mayers, the Cadiz family and Merrilie Ellis for help along the way. Polly Thomas as always proved to be an excellent and efficient colleague, and grateful thanks also go to editor Helena Smith for doing an outstanding job on this edition.

Polly Thomas would like to thank everyone in T&T for their time and help, particularly Dexter Lewis for all things, Skye and Bess Hernandez for making Trinidad research possible and for Contexts comments, Mark and Zena Puddy for longstanding friendship and a great lunch, and Ann Rhodes and Yvonne Joseph for Castara tips. Many thanks also to UK family Celia Rugg, Matthew Thomas and Imogen and Isabella Spencer for unstinting support; and to ever-excellent co-author Rob Coates, editor supreme Helena Smith, Maxine Repath for perfect maps and Nicole Newman for luscious pictures.

Readers' letters

Thanks to all the readers who have taken the time to write in with comments and suggestions (and apologies if we've inadvertently omitted or misspelt anyone's name):

Rosy Dickinson, John Ewan and Amanda, Steph Le Fevre, Dave McKerchar, Erin Knight, Adam Kramer, Louise Kupka, Rachael Greenwood, Marc Halpern, Ben Mitchell, Sandy LeMole, Nick Nicolades, Steve Roebuck, Kathrin Sommer and Katy Winter.

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Map symbols

maps are listed in the full index using coloured text

- - - -	Chapter division boundary	✈	Airport
═	Highway	★	Transport stop
═	Road	⛽	Petrol station
╌	4 wheel drive road	P	Parking
- - - -	Footpath	♠	Museum
—	Waterway	$	Bank
♦	Place of interest	⚖	Market
∿	Reef	ⓘ	Information office
▲	Mountain peak	✉	Post office
⛰	Mountain range	⊞	Hospital
◓	Cave	†	Church (regional maps)
✺	Viewpoint	🕌	Mosque
⩛	Swamp	🛕	Hindu temple
≀	Waterfall	🟧	Building
⛱	Beach with facilities	✚	Church (town maps)
⛱	Beach without facilities	⬭	Stadium
🐢	Turtle nesting site	✝	Cemetery
♜	Fortress	▨	Park
✳	Lighthouse	⬚	Beach
⛳	Golf course		

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Author picks

Throughout this book, we've used the Rough Guides icon to highlight establishments our authors particularly recommend – a perfectly sited hotel, an atmospheric café, a special restaurant. Each has been sent a "Rough Guides Recommends" logo to display on their website. The same icon is also used to flag up book recommendations in the Contexts section. Please send us your own nominations, which our authors will be happy to check out for future editions.

Accommodation price codes

All the accommodation listed in this book has been categorized according to the following price codes. For full details, see p.27.

① US$20 and under
② US$21–45
③ US$46–80
④ US$81–110
⑤ US$111–140
⑥ US$141–170
⑦ US$171–200
⑧ US$201–250
⑨ US$251 and over

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